

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

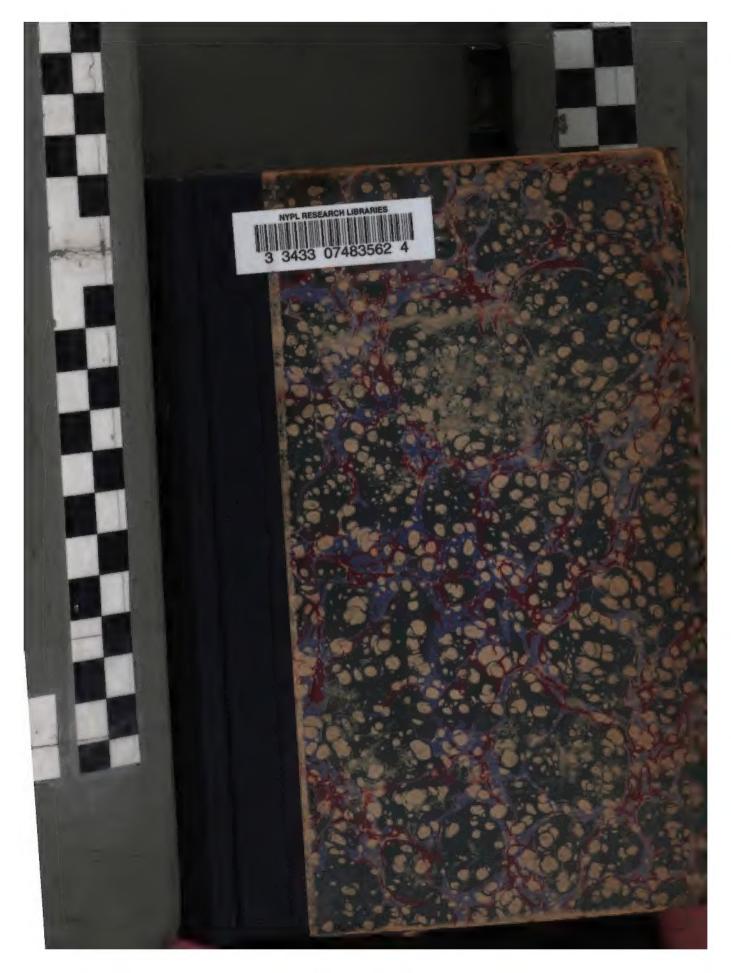
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

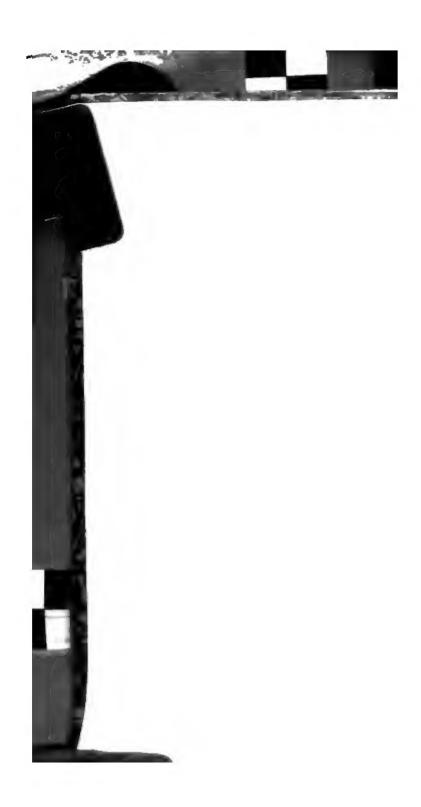
We also ask that you:

- + Make non-commercial use of the files We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + Refrain from automated querying Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + Maintain attribution The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + Keep it legal Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

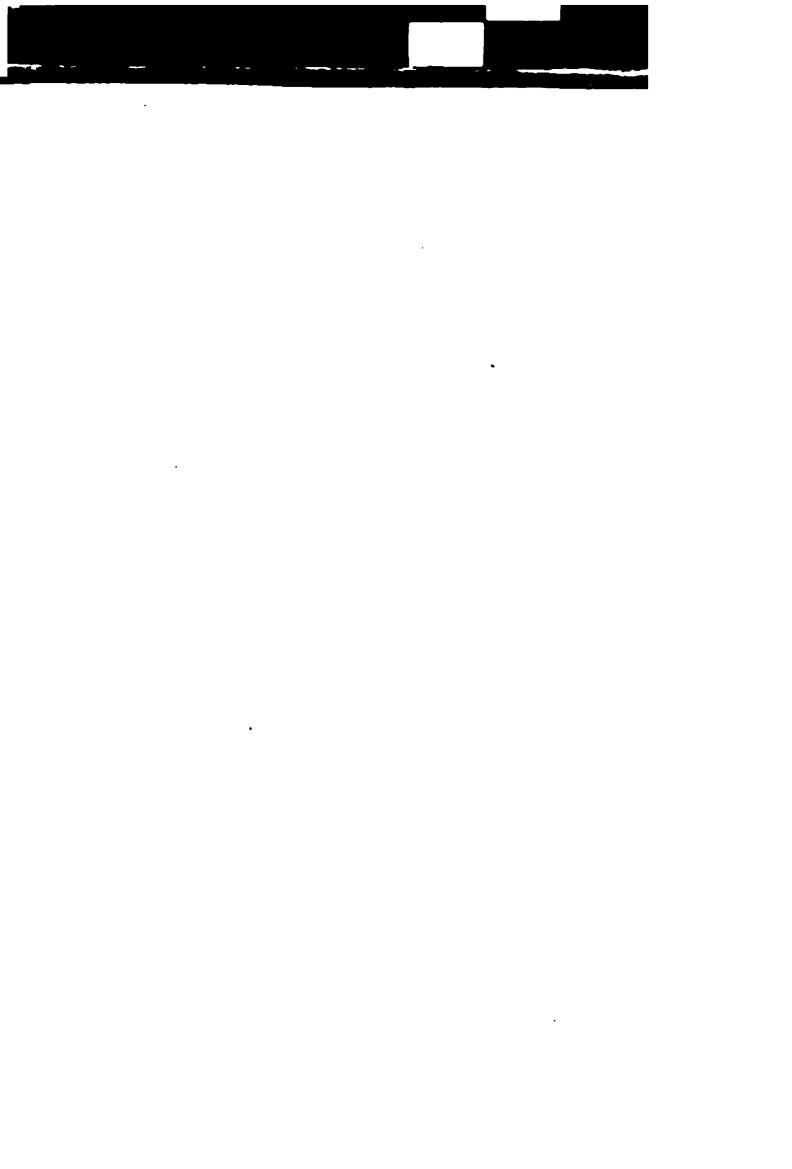
About Google Book Search

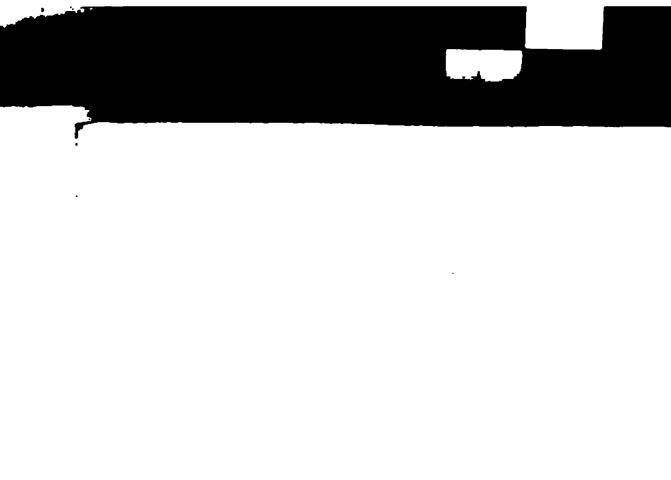
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at http://books.google.com/









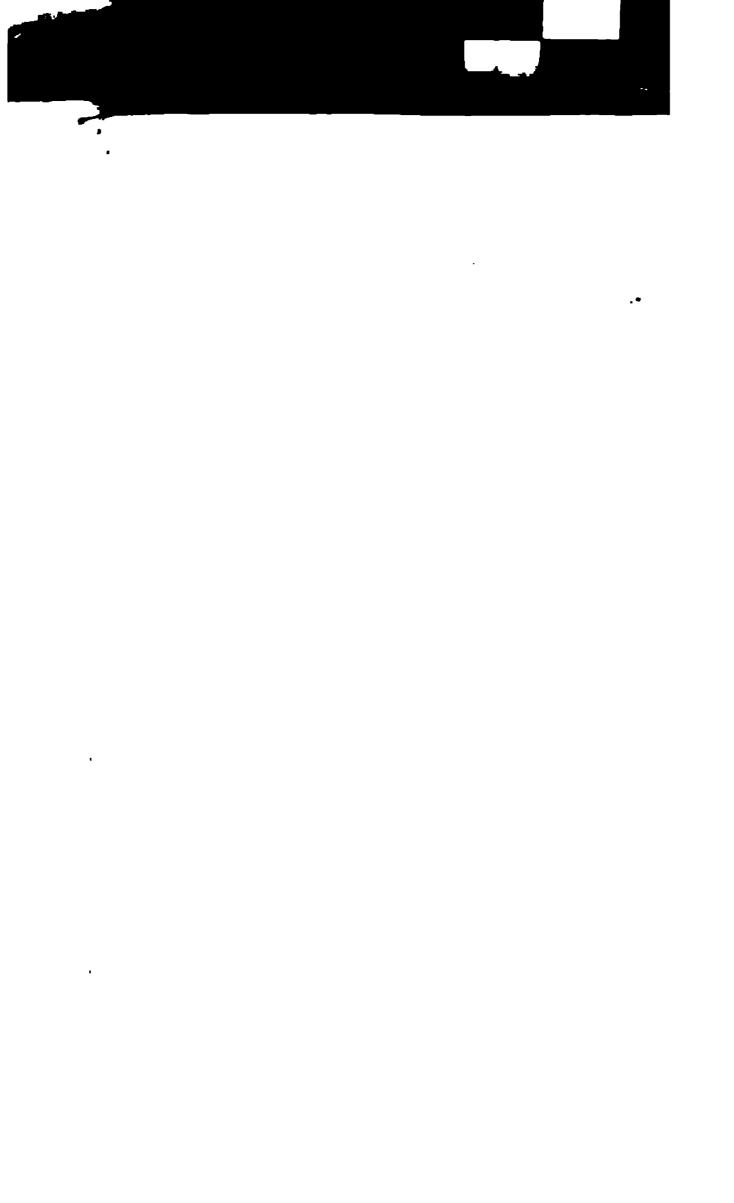


İ

•











About Miss Morninggle

By

LILIAN BELL

Author of "The Story of the Christmas Ship," ";
of an Old Maid," "A Little Sister to the
"The Expatriates," "Carolina Lee,"
Men Remain Bachelors," "The
Runaway Equator," etc.



20

RAND McNALLY & COI

C1916



Copyright, 1916. By Rand McNally & Company

All rights reserved, including translations into foreign languages, including the Scandinavian



PROPERTY

OF THE
NEW YORK
SOCIETY LIBRARY



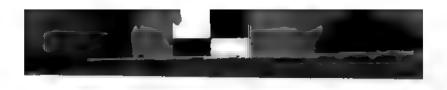


70° € . 1918

Dora Wheeler Keith MY NEIGHBOR



•



CONTENTS

CHAPTER			PAGE
	THE DIAMOND ROBBERY	٠	9
	THE NEIGHBOR-WOMAN ,		29
III.	IN THE HOSPITAL	٠	37
IV.	MRS. GALLOWAY DESCRIBES PRAYER		62
v.	THE HUSBANDLESS WOMAN	•	74
VI.	THE FEAR OF OLD SPROULE	٠	84
VII.	THE RESCUE OF JOE CAMPBELL		101
VIII.	Bob Avery Discovers His Elder Brother		120
IX.	THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE		141
X.	THE ADVENT OF GLORIA		163
XI.	THE FAIRY GODFATHER ARRIVES		185
XII.	MATT McCabe Becomes an Uncle by Breve	ī	198
XIII.	MISS MATTIE'S "BLASPHEMIOUS IDEAR" O	F	-
	CHRISTMAS		224
XIV.	THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN GO SHOPPING		237
XV.	THE NICE SELFISH CHRISTMAS IS PREPARED		255
XVI.	MATT McCabe Helps Out		268
XVII.	OLD AUNTIE PULLS THE CAT'S TAIL		279
XVIII.	IN WHICH THEY ALL RIDE IN AN EXPRESS WAGO	N	291
XIX.	THE RESULT OF THE UNSELFISH CHRISTMAS		301
XX.	THE LETTER FROM MATT McCabe		314
XXI.	BLANCHE TERRANOVA COMES BACK		323
XXII.	JOE CAMPBELL DISAPPEARS		346
	THE PICTURE COMES DOWN FROM THE WALL		356
	IN WHICE MRS. SHAPIRO CANNOT LIE LIE		~
	MAGGIE, AND JEALOUSY ENSUES	_	365
XXV.	SISTER-WOMEN		383
	MAGGIE CONNOR TAKES HER STAND		395
		*	570

CONTENTS

8

CHAPTER XXVII.	THE TRUANT OFFICER CALLS	PAGE 410
XXVIII.	BLANCHE FINDS A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW	
	EARTH	418
XXIX.	Psalms 76:10	438
XXX.	THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN AT THE BOX PARTY .	448
XXXI.	OLD AUNTIE LOVES HER NEIGHBOR AS HERSELF.	461
XXXII.	A PLACE PREPARED FOR YOU	468
XXXIII.	In the Library at Tranquillity	486
XXXIV.	Miss Mattie Finds Her Own Green Pastures	495
XXXV.	THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN HEAR THE GREAT NEWS	507



CHAPTER I

THE DIAMOND ROBBERY

MISS MATTIE MORNINGGLORY, on her way back from the wholesale house to her millinery shop, paused to look at a very smart hat worn by a young woman dressed in the extreme of a very extreme fashion. The hat was unusual, but easily copied, and in imagination Miss Mattie's capable fingers wrought the marvel. She recognized the work of a genius when she saw it, and of the creator of this hat Miss Mattie thought with artistic reverence.

Determined to let no detail escape her, Miss Mattie passed the young woman, then turned to get a front view. But, as she did so, a strange feeling obsessed her. The face under the hat was rife with youthful bloom, but upon its beauty evil of an unmistakable form had set its seal. The bold black eyes were fixed with determination, the full red lips pressed closely together.

Suddenly, as a blue-coated policeman elbowed past her, the young woman of the hat gave a cry of pain and tottered into his very arms. The milliner happened to be looking directly into the girl's eyes as she sank, and Miss Mattie distinctly saw them partly open, then close again, and in that swift glance into the policeman's face was a terrible anxiety.

A crowd immediately gathered, but Miss Mattie, although usually the first to offer assistance in any sort of a crisis, felt her feet bearing her swiftly away, and she recognized in a sort of moral panic that she not only felt no sympathy for the sick woman but, on the other hand, a distinct distaste for the whole occurrence. She even found herself whispering the words, "She was shamming! She was n't ill. That was all put on!"

But why?

There was no reason that Miss Mattie could see then, but as she turned the corner of Broadway a scene of great confusion met her eye. The crowd was all but impenetrable. Men were shouting and gesticulating. Many upper windows of shops and office buildings were filled with eager gazers, and every one seemed to be unconsciously waiting for something. Suddenly came the distant sounds of two pistol shots, and the crowd drew its breath in what was almost a sigh.



ΙI

Evidently the something for which they waited had happened.

Hemmed in, unable to go forward or back, Miss Mattie spoke to a stout, red-faced man against whose arm she was being crowded.

"Excuse me," she said primly, "but could you tell me what has happened?"

"Big di'mond robbery, ma'am! Four young fellows in an auto drove up to that big joolry store, smashed a window, grabbed two trays of unset di'monds, and got away with 'em! Guess them shots we heard was the cops. They was slow in coming, and only two showed up! Gee! Ain't it the limit where cops are when they're needed!"

It was not until after Miss Mattie got back to her shop and began to copy the hat she had seen that the thought struck her. That girl knew of the robbery, and it was her part to detain that policeman!

For a moment the thought paralyzed the older woman, for Miss Mattie, in spite of her good business instinct, was one of the most innocent and unsuspicious of mortals, and things which would be patent to a casual observer glanced harmlessly from her armor of unworldliness, leaving her untouched.

She dropped her work on the floor and hurried through the front room to the door. Across the

street she could see little lame Joe Campbell, the newsboy who sold her her papers, just getting his armful from the news wagon. He saw her, and came hopping across the car tracks, his crutch as active as another leg.

She looked at him compassionately. She could never see disease or disability of any form without being actively concerned in its amelioration, and the healing of this little paralyzed boy had ever been one of her dear projects.

She took the paper in and sat down to read it, but even the enterprise of a great city could not secure all the details of so daring a robbery and print and distribute its papers inside of an hour. This was what Miss Mattie had evidently expected, for she laid it down with a sigh of disappointment that the trick she was rather vain of having seen had not been shown up.

It would be in the morning papers, she told herself, or possibly in a late extra that same night.

It was just six, and no customers. She lighted the gas and put her prettiest hats in the show window. All but one. The smartest hat in her shop, a great drooping Gainsborough with a white ostrich plume which rippled and swirled over its crown, Miss Mattie placed in a drawer. She was shrewd enough to know that the window hats would bait customers, who would



expect her to be fortified with a pièce de résistance. She looked at herself in the glass, smiling and humming a tune, then went back into the quiet dimness of her sitting room to enjoy the one luxury of her busy day—"a good think."

Thoughts were of an extreme pleasantness to Miss Morningglory these days. She was just forty, and was having her first love affair.

That it was with a man twelve years younger than herself did not strike her with surprise except in those rare moments when she gave way to the "blues," and wondered ungratefully at her own good fortune.

But to-night she tasted to the full her joy and pride in her youthful love. Larry McMahon was bonny enough to have won almost any young girl, yet he had chosen her. She blushed with pleasure at the vain thought.

How well she remembered how it all began. It was once, on a Saturday when she was returning from the bank, she was boldly followed by this extremely good-looking young man. At the door of her millinery shop he accosted her and insisted that he had met her at a church social.

At first she could not remember it, but by dint of her asking many questions as to his memory of the date, he was able to convince her, and she therefore invited him to call.

It was strange how quickly she obtained his

confidence. He praised her shop, her taste in color, her skill in making hats. He told her how lonely life was for a home body in a strange city, how hard it was to get a permanent job when so much jealousy existed, how uncertain was the help which came from his father, a clergyman in a small town out West, and in her kind-heartedness she offered to help him out now and then with a small loan.

She quivered with pride as she recalled how at first he had refused to borrow from a woman; how he declared it was the man's part to help a lady over the rough places in life, and how he wondered if it ever would be his privilege to do anything for her.

Miss Morningglory had been well educated but environment had made sad havoc of her once careful speech, and Larry McMahon's fluency often swept her off her feet. She could not remembe exactly how his love-making began, save that had refused to take the money unless it came a gift and her hand came with it. No one wo ever share the sweet of that dazzling mom when to her lonely spinster heart came the kneedge that this blue-eyed, curly-haired, laug young god was asking for her love. In her mind she had always seen herself despised rejected of men. Never, even in her young had she attracted them, but now all the glo



15

heaven and earth combined to swing her into a starlit space where mere words failed and only the Infinite could comprehend.

For over a year now she had been saving for her wedding. For a year she had cooked for Larry, mended for him, bought his socks and ties and handkerchiefs at the wholesale houses where she got her own supplies. She kept no account of the money she gave him. He was proud, and it was always she who offered it.

"How did you know I was broke?" he would say with an accent of surprise. Then he would kiss her hand, doubled up with the money in it, and pretend to push it away, so that she always had to argue and coax him to take it.

Then, oh, the joy of what he would say just afterwards! Surely no lad on earth had so sweet a tongue as Larry McMahon, and seven times a day the honestly humble heart of Miss Mattie Morningglory would lift to high heaven its unanswered question of how she ever came to be so blessed. But high heaven made no answer to Miss Mattie and indeed, like most who question the unknown God, whom they ignorantly worship, she expected none.

Tears coursed down her cheeks as she sat there in the dimly lighted back room, thinking over her wonderful prospects. So occupied, time slipped by unheeded.

Then from the salesroom came the sound of a customer. Hastily Miss Mattie rose, pressed her handkerchief to her cheeks and eyes, examined her face in the glass, and hurried out.

The strong light at first made her blink. Then she sighed. This girl, Cerise Henrici, having a half hour at her disposal, had come to "try on" hats, with no intention of buying. It was merely an excuse to sit in front of a mirror and force another woman to flatter her and even to harp on her good points. Every milliner has one or more such among her customers.

But Miss Mattie, if not politic was kindhearted, and submitted with a good grace.

"How do you do, Cerise?" she said affably. "What are you up to these days?"

"Oh, nothin' much," answered Miss Henrici.
"I want to see some real swell hats. I've got a beau that all he cares for is for hats. Go anything with an ostrich plume?"

Miss Mattie's courage rose. If there was man in it, she might succeed in making a sal But usually Cerise Henrici came and look over the models, then bought her materials made her own hats.

With grim determination, Miss Mattie solved to sell her the one she had put awa the drawer. But first she baited her with the in the window Cerise had plainly come to t



17

Cerise preened herself before the mirror like a canary after its bath.

"I've got to take more exercise!" she declared, pushing down her belt. "When I sit down, I just seem to settle. I'm a sight, Flossy says."

"I was just going to say you'd lost five pounds!" said Miss Mattie bravely. "Seems to me your face looks thin. Now this hat is so big, it would make any face look small."

"It's a beaut!" said Cerise. "But it ain't different enough. I want one nobody else kin get on to with stuff from the ten-cent store."

"What are you willing to pay, Cerise?" asked Miss Mattie warily. She did not propose even to show her pet to the girl unless there was at least a sporting chance to sell it.

"I'd give a good deal for a swell lid right now," said Cerise. "This feller I'm goin' with is goin' to be made foreman soon, 'n' what I buy now must be one that will knock his eye out. It's got to be one to help the good work along."

"Have n't you landed Danny yet?" asked Miss Mattie. She took the hat out cautiously, holding it so that the girl could not see it until it had been placed in position on her head.

"How'd you know who it was? Oh, I know! Larry McMahon must 'a' told you. Say, it gives me the creeps just to think I ever danced with

that fellow. But he's so handsome! Who'd 'a' thought he'd ever turn out to be such a crook?"

"Such a what?" asked Miss Mattie. The precious hat was held in both hands and poised over Miss Henrici's blond head.

"Put it on! What's the matter with you?" said Cerise, with crisp rudeness. "I said, such a crook! You know what he 's done, don't you?"

The hat fell from the milliner's trembling fingers, landing askew on the customer's head. Cerise looked up, and set it right.

"There! That is a bird! Say, was you awful upset when you seen the extrys to-night? You used to stake Larry when he was broke, he told me. You're his aunt, ain't you? What's the matter?"

Miss Mattie had seized the girl's shoulder in a nervous clasp.

"Tell me," she whispered. "I don't know what you mean. What has Larry done?"

The face of Cerise Henrici lighted with eager interest. She liked to be the bearer of malicious news.

"Why, Larry was one of them four di'mond robbers, and in the getaway they shot a copper. The papers say Larry done it. His girl helped. She—"

"His girl?"

The voice was a wail, but Cerise paused not, being unsuspicious of the depth of Larry's iniquity.

"Uh huh! Some say he's already married to her, but anyway she pretended to faint, and—"

With a cry, Miss Mattie staggered back. Cerise, under the bewildering hat, turned in amazement.

"What makes you care so much," she said, "just bein' his aunt?"

Miss Mattie shook her head. Her hands beat the air.

"Sit down, do!" urged Cerise. "'N' don't take on so! Larry only got what was coming to him. He's been looking for trouble for years, the boys say. Gee! I would n't be that girl of his for a pretty. She's crazy about him. Say, what'll you take for this hat? I'll buy it if it ain't too high."

Miss Mattie, gasping for breath, made no reply. Cerise took the hat off, looked at the price mark, and then took stock of the milliner's shattered condition. She narrowed her eyes shrewdly.

"It's marked eighteen dollars," she said. "I reely had n't ought to afford it, but I'll give you twelve for it. What say? Will you take it?"

Still Miss Mattie stared at her customer with unseeing eyes, her breath coming draggingly from between her pale lips.

Cerise rose quickly and counted out the money.

"I'll wear it and put my old one in the box, if you don't mind," she said, making the transfer with nimble fingers. She kept glancing at the suffering woman with a shrewdly calculating eye.

"There's the money on the table. I must hurry. Now I would n't leave you, if I did n't have to. Don't feel so bad. I'm 'most sorry I told you. Well—good-by, Miss Morningglory. I've got to push along."

How long Miss Mattie sat there, groaning with every breath, she never knew. It was odd that she should believe Cerise, without further proof; but it was because she had always told herself that her fortune was too good to be true. Even the existence of another girl, which jealous instinct at once enthroned in her true place in Larry's affections, came unbidden out of the "I told you so" of her trembling fear. Now she realized that this Nemesis of another girl had always hovered, a dim black shadow, in the back of her mind. A murderous, jealous rage, such as the gentle woman never dreamed herself capable of, rose and choked her. She was shocked to feel her fingers curve in her lap as if around the "other girl's" throat. At that moment the lust to kill her rival held full sway, then as quickly fled, vanquished by the clutch of pain which swept all other emotions away. Larry was gone—lost to her forever! The thought paralyzed her.



A newsboy calling another extra roused Miss Mattie. She tottered to the door and bought one. A stifled shriek burst from her lips as she opened the paper, for there on the front page was Larry's laughing face just as she had seen it forty times. It was a snapshot, but oh, the companions he was with! Their faces were in striking contrast to the innocence of his, yet his sobriquet, "Sunday Larry," explained it. Her stricken eyes almost refused to read the condemning facts that he was known to the police under such a name—or under any name! Her Larry!

Greedily she read every word, but although there were many columns of description and surmise, the main facts had been told her by the man in the crowd and by Cerise. The policeman had been shot, but it was not known whether he would die; and the blame of the shooting was laid upon Larry.

Only one tremulous hope shone through it all. The thieves had got away. In their high-powered racing car they had distanced their pursuers and thus far had not been apprehended.

Then he was still free! She hoped, oh, how she hoped and prayed that he would get away. Even though hopelessly lost to herself, she wanted to think of him as clear of the prisoners' dock and the felon's cell.

She got up nervously and began to think.

What could she do to help? He would need money, of course. He always did. She started to go into the back room where she kept her cash, when the front door was stealthily opened and the strange young woman whose hat she had intended to copy stole in as noiselessly as a shadow.

She took no notice of the still, silent figure of the milliner, but began to look at the hats, turning them about and humming a tune under her breath, always with her eyes on the front door and window. But the drawn agony of her face no rouge or powder could obliterate. It was the face of a girl in mortal suffering.

Suddenly, without even looking in Miss Morningglory's direction, the girl said in a sibilant whisper, "I've got to speak to you! Quick!"

A shiver of jealous repulsion shook the older woman. The purity of her mind shrank from the story written in the girl's face, but for Larry's sake she forced herself to answer.

"Come with me," she murmured.

The girl maneuvered until she was near the rear door, then she darted after Miss Mattie and stood with her back against the door, which she had closed behind her. She was panting as if from hard running. She searched Miss Mattie's face with eager cupidity. How much could she be made to disgorge? She stood in the girl's

eyes, not as a suffering sister-woman but as a Good Thing who, if properly handled, could furnish the money for her rival to follow Larry and gain her own selfish ends. She glanced quickly around the room. It had two doors and one window, partly hidden by long, thick curtains, and was lighted by one side gas jet on the wall. She turned to Miss Mattie.

"Larry sent me!" she whispered. "He's hiding. They almost got him. He's got half of the diamonds, but he could n't sell one to save his life. He wants money. He said you'd help him to get away, because you were his best friend!"

"Friend!" The word burst from Miss Mattie's lips before she thought. In her confusion she turned to her desk and fumbled with the lock. Then she looked up. The girl was beside her, urging her in rapid whispers to hurry, her nervous fingers helping with the key.

Miss Mattie paused and straightened herself. Her jealousy and hate of half an hour ago had oddly disappeared, merged in the overwhelming desire to help Larry in his extremity. Later she knew it would all return. She felt it throbbing dumbly.

"How do I know that Larry sent you?" she asked cautiously.

The girl threw out her hands. Her lips tightened.

"He did n't have time to write even a line!" she cried, forgetting caution in her eagerness. "He said you'd know."

Miss Mattie walked away from the desk.

"Sit down," she said. "I must know more. You've got to prove it to me."

The girl's face flamed with a murderous anger.

"You fool!" she hissed. "Why, Larry may be taken by the cops, while you dally! Why don't you believe me? You're his aunt, aren't you? Sure you've often heard him speak of me. I'm Blanche Terranova! I'm his girl!"

The words of Cerise Henrici returned to Miss Mattie's mind.

"What makes you think I am his aunt?" she asked.

"He always said so!" answered Blanche.
"Are n't you? Or is that another lie of his?"

"Does he lie?" asked Miss Mattie, as if such a possibility had never entered her mind.

The girl looked at her, then bit her under lip to conceal a smile, in spite of her anxiety.

"Well—yes, he does; to me, at least. Maybe he never did to you!"

Miss Mattie's face crimsoned.

"Oh, yes," she said quietly, "I guess he has to me, too."

"Men all do," volunteered Blanche.

"Do they?" asked Miss Mattie.

"You must have had beaux when you were as young as me. Did n't they fool you? Or try to?"

"Perhaps so," admitted Miss Mattie. Then, "Where does Larry want to go?" she asked.

"As if he'd tell!" derided the girl.

"Well, how much does he want?"

Quick as a flash, Blanche countered the question.

"How much have you got?"

The two women measured each other across the memory of a man's laughing eyes.

"You want to go with him!" cried Miss Mattie.
"I don't believe he sent you!"

"He did, oh, he did!" cried the girl. "I'll tell you the truth—the whole truth, so help me! I do want to go with him! I must! Don't you understand? And we have n't got enough for two. He said you'd help us out. He said you'd never refused him once, when he asked you for money!"

Miss Mattie's gentle lips could not form into a sneer, but her face showed her disgust.

"He never asked me for money in his life!" she said proudly. "I always offered it!"

"Offered it!" screamed the girl. "Offered it? What for?"

"Well, I am not his aunt. I'm not any relation to him," she said meaningly. It was as near cruelty as her tender heart would permit her to go.

The girl looked her incredulity. Still, the truth of Larry's perfidy did not dawn. The conceit of a beauty which appeals to men blinded and hardened her. She was one of those candid, frank egoists who never thought of any one but herself, and who openly met every circumstance with a frank appraisal as to how much it could be made to serve her immediate purpose. She used her cleverness basely.

"He's lied then more than I suspected," she said simply. "I can't make out your game. I can only come out flat with Larry's message. Will you give us money to go away together? We'll need at least three hundred dollars! Have you got it—in that desk?"

The desperate look in the girl's eyes made Miss Mattie hesitate. She was taller than Blanche, but the strain of the last few hours had taken all her strength.

Blanche saw the refusal in Miss Mattie's eyes.

"You've got it, but you won't give it to me!" she shrilled. "You don't understand! You don't understand! You blind fool!" Her voice rose to a scream.

"Yes, I do!" said Miss Mattie suddenly.

"You do? Then I'll make you give it! After Larry's made his get-away do you think I'm going to be left behind all alone, to—"

The door against which she leaned was just

27

then pushed open swiftly, sending her forward with a rush, and Larry McMahon, covered with dust, his face white and wild, stood before them. His stern eyes riveted on the girl.

"You here?" he whispered. He turned to Miss Mattie to see how much she knew. One glance sufficed. He advanced on Blanche with velvet tread, his curved fingers a menace she dropped to the floor to avoid.

"You've done it now!" he hissed, seizing her by the throat. "You've told her! Now she won't give me anything. I'll be caught! The cops saw me come here. I've got to fight my way out!"

"Are the police coming here," cried Miss Mattie, "and after you? Oh, Larry! Larry!"

It was a cry such as a man hears but once in his life. He released Blanche's neck involuntarily. Both looked at her, and in Blanche's face, as she crouched on the floor, an incredulous wonder grew. By that cry, she knew Miss Mattie's secret.

The man was swift to act upon it.

"I have n't a cent!" he whispered. "If I could get away now, and this blows over, I'll come back—"

Miss Mattie rushed for the desk, opened it, and, with feverish haste, thrust a roll of bills into his hand.

"It's all I have!" she said brokenly. "Take it, Larry! Go as far away as you can, and never come back! Never! Never! Do you hear?"

His furtive glance dropped from her face, drawn and twisted with a woman's mortal pain. Blanche clutched his arm.

"You'll take me, won't you, Larry? There's plenty there! I won't be in the way!"

He struck her off.

"In the way!" he sneered. "A nice chance I'd have if I took you!"

The girl grew savage. She flung her arms around him.

"Then I'll follow you!" she cried. "I'll track you down! I'll help the police! I'll turn on you!"

The sound of a door violently flung open, and heavy tramping feet in the front room, caused a sudden, sick hush to fall on all three.

Larry drew a revolver, darted swiftly behind the heavy curtains which partly covered an area window, and waited. As both front and rear doors burst open simultaneously, and policemen with drawn pistols crowded in, Blanche skillfully tripped two of them. As they plunged to the floor, the crash of broken window glass, a pistol shot, and shouts of rage sounded with dreadful din in the sudden darkness, for Miss Mattie, on an impulse, had turned out the gas and then slid to the floor in a merciful unconsciousness.

CHAPTER II

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMAN

WHEN Miss Mattie came to herself it was so dark and still that at first she could remember nothing. Stirring feebly, she realized that she was not in bed. Then her groping hand felt the grain of the carpet, and, with the sudden impact, memory returned.

Larry! He would need her!

She tried to sit up, but fell back with a groan. If only she could crawl to the couch, which served her as a bed! She reached out and touched the wall. Directly overhead was the gas jet she remembered turning out. Had the sudden darkness accomplished its purpose? Did Larry get away? Or was he taken? Oh, if some one would only come and help her! Some one who knew what had happened!

Dizzily she drew herself to a sitting posture and leaned against the wall. Lights were flickering outside, for now and then their wandering rays shot in from the back window and sent shadows dancing.

After what seemed an hour, Miss Mattie dragged herself up, groped for a match, and lighted the gas. From somewhere near, a clock



was striking twelve. It was only midnight then, of the same day in which she had died! It seemed another age, another world, and she herself another woman.

Blankly she looked around. Everywhere were evidences of the struggle in the dark. Chairs were overturned, the heavy curtains torn half down, the window broken, both doors unlocked, and upon the floor the muddy imprint of alien feet. The sight unnerved her. She covered her eyes with her hand and reached out blindly, but her groping hand clutched empty air, and with a sob she sank to the floor again.

Suddenly she heard footsteps, heavy, slow, and creaking. "It sounds like my upstairs neighborwoman," whispered Miss Mattie. If so, Mrs. Galloway was a kindly soul and would help her.

"Land sakes, Miss Mattie! Kin I come in? It's only me, Mrs. Galloway! Why, what in the world are you up to?"

"I don't seem to be up to anything," said Miss Mattie in a weak whisper. "Could you help me over to that couch, do you think?"

The neighbor-woman creaked in, peering from her nearsighted, large brown eyes. She lifted Miss Mattie in her arms, muttering angrily.

"There! Is that better?" she said, laying the tall, slender form of the milliner on the couch-bed.



THE NEIGHBOR-WOMAN

Miss Mattie nodded.

"Lots better!" she whispered.

Mrs. Galloway turned away and began setting the room to rights, still muttering.

"What's the matter?" asked Miss Mattie, when a few minutes had passed. "Are you talking to yourself or to me?"

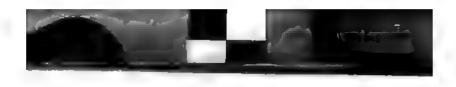
"I don't know what I'm doing!" said Mrs. Galloway, "I'm talking to myself, I guess! And to that Maggie Connor! I blame myself for not reelizin' how undependable she is, and stayin' with you myself! But 'stead of that I had to go traipsin' to the p'leece station—follerin' the patrol wagon jus' like I was a kid. My land, Miss Mattie! What's the matter?"

Miss Mattie struggled to a sitting posture. Her voice sounded queer even to herself.

"Tell me!" she gasped. "What happened?" "Why, don't you know?" exclaimed Mrs. Galloway.

Miss Mattie shook her head.

"You must 'a' fainted the minute you turned out the gas, then," said Mrs. Galloway. "You'd 'a' been arrested for that alone if Terry Connor, Maggie's brother, had n't 'a' been one of the p'licemen. She was here, 'n' her mother, 'n' Mrs. Shapiro, and Maggie made 'em leave you here. Of course the p'leece wanted you, but Maggie, she said she'd be responsible—"



Miss Mattie smote her hands together.

"What happened to - them?" she cried.

"Who? Larry McMahon 'n' that girl o' his'n? Why, they was arrested 'n' taken to jail 'n' locked up! Land sakes! I keep forgettin' that you was unconscious. Why, you missed the biggest fight the p'leece has had for ten years. Larry fought like a wildcat, and the shootin' was something awful, but they got him! 'N' her, too. I seen 'em piled into the patrol wagon, 'n' I follered it clean to the jail. The crowd like to tore me to pieces, but I went right on."

"They — they got him, after all!" murmured Miss Mattie. "Larry is in jail! Larry is in jail!"

"Why, where else did you expect him to be, after all that devilment? At Mrs. Vanderbilt's? Huh! Jail is too good for him! 'N' as to that girl of his — say, I'll bet you'll be wanted at the tri'l! So you'll get some of the excitement yet!"

Miss Mattie's white face brought the woman to her senses.

"Say, don't you want me to fix you some tea 'n' toast? Or a good cup of coffee? I got a little cream on the top of my milk bottle that you could have just as well as not. I ain't a-goin' to touch it myself. Will you try to eat if I'll fix you something?"

"Yes, I will," murmured Miss Mattie. "Come

to think of it, I have n't eaten anything since my lunch yesterday."

"Land sakes!" ejaculated the neighbor-woman.

She wasted no time in talk, but hurried up the backstairs and in half an hour was back again with coffee and toast, which Miss Mattie managed to choke down, under her determination not to give out entirely when Larry might need her.

"I can't understand you bein' so tuckered out," said the woman. "Course it was some shock to have 'em both land on you when they was in such trouble, but unless you got malaria in your system before it happened, I don't see how you come to give out so. Was you very fond of yer nephew?"

Miss Mattie dragged herself to a sitting posture and set her cup down.

"Mrs. Galloway," she said in shaking tones, "once for all, I am not Larry McMahon's aunt! And I wish you'd stop saying so!"

"Land sakes! I ain't said it but once!" cried the woman. "Say, Miss Mattie, that there girl of his'n—"

"She's his wife!" cried Miss Mattie. "I found that out yesterday."

"She ain't neither!" contradicted Mrs. Galloway. "I heard some o' the things she said to him. And she ain't married to him yet."

"Then she will be!" said Miss Mattie.

The milliner imagined she was concealing her secret bravely, but her braided fingers, her drawn, white face, and her weakness told another story.

Mrs. Galloway drew closer, the nearsighted gaze fixed on the nervous figure on the couch. Then in her large, brown eyes a pitying wonder dawned.

"Miss Mattie Morningglory," she said, "you don't mean to tell me that that there boy has fooled you into thinkin' that — But there! He could 'a' fooled me too, with them laughing blue eyes of his'n. Only I'm sorry, just awful sorry, he got you! Why, you poor thing! Don't cry so, Miss Mattie! You'll get me goin' too. Here, take my handkerchief. It's clean; I just grabbed it out of the top drawer as I come by. Now just lean your head on me! Why, your cheeks are hot as fire and your temples throbbing — have you got a headache? Now, ain't that a shame! And you so good and kind to people! Ain't it just the limit that you should go and be took in by a good-lookin' scamp like him? I seen him coming every Sunday night, but I never give it a thought, except to say to myself, now 'n' then, 'Miss Mattie's got a right good-lookin' nephew.' 'N' I'm glad I did n't know, cause I'd 'a' spent a miserable winter if I'd 'a' knowed you was bein' took in. Land sakes, but men are awful! Think o' his carryin' on with this here girl till —"

A shriek of anguish from Miss Mattie stopped the neighbor-woman's flow of words.

"Don't talk about it, Mrs. Galloway!" sobbed Miss Mattie. "I'm too — sore to listen! I can't be polite. Just let me be real rude! It — it feels good just to come right out and tell you I can't stand it!"

A noise in the area made Mrs. Galloway tiptoe to the window and look out.

"Come with me," she whispered. "There was somebody a-listenin' outside o' that winder. You ain't in no condition to be interviewed by no reporter, nor talked to by no p'leeceman. Once I get you into my room, you go to bed, 'n' if they git to you, they'll git there over my dead body!"

Shaking and trembling from fear and weakness, Miss Mattie stumbled up the stairs to Mrs. Galloway's rooms, where she went into a stupor which lasted for days.

She was wanted as a witness at the speedy trial of Larry McMahon, to see if he could not be made to divulge the whereabouts of the other three, who had escaped with most of the jewels. But Mrs. Galloway mercifully kept the news from the stricken woman until the summons came.

When the prosecuting attorney called for Miss Mattie Morningglory, a frail shadow of a woman, supported by the strong arm of the neighborwoman, rose and tottered to the witness stand.



She took the oath, sank into the witness chair, and, for the first time since she had known him in all his worthlessness, was face to face with the man for whom, had he truly loved her, she would have slaved and suffered and endured with all the passion and fervor of a cave-woman. He had dominated her starved soul, peopled it with images of unrivaled bliss, stirred her imagination, roused her dormant mental energies, and wakened in her the mothering instinct which would know no rest until it found its outlet and expression.

And as she gazed at her lover with her whole soul in her eyes, the man shrank back in his chair beside his counsel, appalled by what he saw there.

Her testimony was highly favorable to the prisoner, but, in the midst of it, a wave of blackness rose before her vision, the room swam, her breath came short, and with a gasp Miss Mattie's head fell forward and before any one could reach her she had toppled to the floor.

The judge declared a recess, an ambulance was summoned, and in an hour Miss Mattie was in a hospital with a slow fever which kept her there until the weeks had run into months, and Larry McMahon was in his cell at Ossining.

CHAPTER III

IN THE HOSPITAL

WHEN consciousness first returned to Miss Mattie she found herself in a hospital ward with narrow white cots on each side of her as far as her tired eyes could reach. Racking pain in every nerve and a sickening sense of irretrievable loss caused her to realize that she was still in this miserable existence we call life. In her delirium she believed she had died, and she clung to the hope until her clearing brain denied her this poor consolation.

The pain traveled in waves, and bright colors danced before her aching eyes. Her temples beat so that she shrank from them and tried not to be so close to the next blow. A raging thirst added to her discomfort, yet she was too weak to ask for water.

Hours passed, and she dozed or drifted back into unconsciousness. In her stupor she was dimly conscious of the moans which came from the cots near by. Occasionally a sob would rouse her, but after a moment or two she floated back into oblivion. The shadows on the wall turned into a gray figure of Pain, with reddened eyelids and fevered lips. She drifted from cot

to cot, in and out of the door, and wherever she paused, the suffering increased. Groans and cries followed the touch of her icy finger, yet she never paused, but swept her tattered gray draperies from one to another ceaselessly.

Whenever the swirling, smoke-colored wraith paused near Miss Mattie she tried to evade its touch, but her efforts were of no avail, and dimly she realized that some of the moans which so distressed her were her own.

She knew that she was roused now and then to feel something forced between her lips — medicine or food, she could not tell which. Sometimes the doctors and nurses whispered near her, but if she caught a few of the sinister words they brought no terror, but only a smile of hope, and then she forgot them in sleep.

One day she awoke to full consciousness. She knew that she was going to live, and that her wish to pass out into the unknown was thwarted.

She tried to go back, to stay the pulsing life which hourly grew stronger, but she could not. A nurse came and looked at her, leaning on the footboard and shaking the bed until Miss Mattie trembled with agony. Another nurse bent over the next cot, changing the sheets and making it ready for an occupant. Idly, Miss Mattie wondered who it would be. The cot on the other side was occupied by a child, who sobbed

incessantly. Miss Mattie tried not to listen. The only time the child was quiet was when a lady with a wonderful voice came and spoke strange words to her—long words which Miss Mattie's weak brain could not hold, but which soothed and quieted all within range of hearing. Fragments which the voice spoke sounded familiar, as if some dim, far-off truth, never understood, miraculously became simple and applicable here and now. When the lady came, Miss Mattie always found herself listening, and afterwards her weak lips tried to repeat the blessed promises—leaves from the tree which were for the healing of the nations.

Once, when she was thus occupied, there was a commotion in the corridor. Groans of pain, excited voices, and peremptory commands mingled. Miss Mattie opened her eyes.

A patient was being brought in on a stretcher. She was evidently in mortal anguish, for under the sheet which covered her one could see the outline of her knees drawn almost up to her chin.

Miss Mattie saw the gray figure of Pain as it swept near, bent over, and touched the sufferer.

She was lifted into the cot next Miss Mattie, and the voice of one of the doctors said: "I've given her all I dare!"

Dr. Follansbee laughed.

"I'll give her a little more and take the risk. We can't stand this!"

A lady who had accompanied them said crisply: "I should think *she* could not stand this much longer!"

"Oh, people can stand more than they think," said the doctor. "As soon as the pain stops, we will operate."

"I will not be operated on!" cried the woman. "Ether will kill me!"

"We do not want an operation, Dr. Follansbee," said the lady. "I am her sister, and I know that she has an excellent reason for not wishing one. This attack is not serious, is it?"

"The pain is beyond control—as you see!" answered the doctor. "If she is not operated on within twenty-four hours—"

"I will not have an operation!" reiterated the sick woman. "I'd rather die of pain than of ether."

Both doctors whispered to the sister, who was standing at the foot of the cot, where Miss Mattie could see her distinctly.

A look of fear came over her face. She tried to speak, but choked.

The sobs and groans continued. The woman tossed from side to side of the cot.

"You see," said the doctor, "the morphine has not the slightest effect. I have given her all I dare, and it has only partially acted."

The woman's sister came around and attempted to take the sufferer's hand.

"Alice," she said, "perhaps it would be wise — the doctors know best, dear —"

At this, self-control vanished; the patient raved.

A look of understanding passed between those gathered around the bed. The operation was tacitly agreed to, and the sufferer knew it.

By a superhuman effort she quieted herself, and the watchers, thinking the drug was taking effect, slipped away.

Miss Mattie turned her head and saw that the woman was biting her arm to keep from making a noise. The gray figure was very near.

The sound of voices came in from the corridor, where plans for the operation were being discussed. Miss Mattie's heart beat anxiously. She almost forgot her own pain.

Suddenly the occupants of both cots were aware that a strange lady had entered and drawn near. Miss Mattie remembered nothing of her face but her eyes—lambent pools of compassion they seemed to her. Then Miss Mattie knew that this was the lady of the Voice.

She began to speak to the suffering woman, and the gray figure shrank away.

"In God's creation there is no pain! He made all that was made — good!" The Voice was healing in itself.

Miss Mattie held her breath to listen.

No pain? What then were these trip-hammers in her temples, these waves of aching nervousness which went quivering down her spent body, billowing again and again from her head to her feet? Were they of mortal origin?

"God is everywhere!" said the Voice.

Miss Mattie closed her eyes. The speaker seemed to disappear, and only her disembodied message sounded through the silence.

From an unknown source the words of a forgotten script returned to Miss Mattie's mind. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord."

The Lord! What an odd place to prepare His way — in a hospital! Nevertheless, as if an ancient parchment were being unrolled in a desert place, with an inspired message of peace and hope, the Voice continued its wonderful statements.

"Wherever the pain seems worst, there God is!"
The trip-hammers beat more softly. The gray
figure began to sift into shadow.

"God never made pain, and only His creation is eternal!" the Voice went on. "You know this! It is all in the Bible!"

"I've heard it, but I don't believe it!" muttered the sick woman.

"I believe!"

Miss Mattie heard her own voice with astonishment. It sounded weak and far away, and she never would have known it for her own except that she lay gasping after the feeble effort.

So feeble it was that neither of the others heard her. The Voice continued, and the sufferer did not again dissent. Her moans ceased. She no longer tossed upon her narrow bed.

Miss Mattie listened eagerly to the Voice, but soon it began to grow indistinct. Sound grew distant, and then died away. The shadowy wraith named Pain resolved itself into a thin wisp of mist and floated out of the window. Miss Mattie smiled faintly to see it go. Her eyes closed peacefully. A great calm descended upon her, and she remembered no more until she awoke to a new day.

When Miss Mattie opened her eyes the sun was shining brilliantly and the nurse, Miss Callahan, stood beside her, with something on a tray.

"Well, you have slept!" she said. "Eighteen hours! Feel better?"

Miss Mattie smiled — just with one side of her face, that she might not start the pain again.

"Much better!" she said. Then, to her surprise, she heard herself say, "There is no pain!"

She was unconsciously repeating what she had heard the day before, but Miss Callahan responded briskly.



"Well, it's time it went! My, but you have been sick! We thought you'd go, once or twice!"

Miss Mattie started to say that she wished she had gone, but the words would not come; and when she thought, she found that there was no wish to say them.

What had happened?

She did not know; only everything seemed brighter. The sunshine flickered gayly on the walls. No shadows lurked even in the dim corners.

Dr. Follansbee walked briskly by, nodding to Miss Mattie but ignoring the nurse.

Miss Mattie turned her head cautiously to examine her neighbor in the next bed, but two surprises awaited her — she could move without pain, and the bed was empty — the woman gone.

"Why, where —" began Miss Mattie, when the nurse interrupted.

"I don't wonder you're surprised! Here—let me feed you while I talk! That woman has gone home! I've been nursing eight years, and I never saw anything like it. The pain stopped just like that! She went to sleep and slept till ten o'clock last night. Then the doctors came and had me waken her. They were going to operate. She let them carry her into the operating room and lay her on the table. Then they made an examination, and she laughed. There

was nothing the matter with her! No rigidity — no pain — no fever — no inflammation — pulse normal. My, but the doctors were surprised! They could n't understand it. And Dr. Follansbee was mad, because he had diagnosed the case as one of the worst he ever saw, and told her sister at four o'clock that she would n't live through the night if she was n't operated on. But they could n't operate on a well woman, so they brought her back. She was still laughing at Dr. Follansbee's face! 'Miss Callahan,' says she to me, 'I'm hungry. Go ask the doctor if I can have some food — and a lot of it!' I just hate the doctor, so I went and asked him, because I knew he would n't like it. They were all four standing in the corridor, talking about the case and saying it was the most mysterious thing that ever happened in this hospital. I put the question, and Dr. Follansbee jerked out, 'Give her any damned thing she wants. I hope it'll kill her!' I flew! I got her a big meal, and I never saw any one eat as she did. Then she went to sleep and never moved, the night nurse said, till six this morning."

"Did she sleep, too?" whispered Miss Mattie.
"Sure she did! I came on duty again at six,
and she coaxed me to dress her,— just to torment
the doctors. So I got her clothes and helped her.
But when I went to hook her, blest if she did n't

stand up and walk out from behind the screen! It scared one patient so she yelled, and waked up three or four more. But you never peeped. You were sleeping like the dead."

"I did n't hear a sound," said Miss Mattie.

"I know you did n't. Well, she had breakfast, and when Dr. Follansbee came at eight o'clock she had her hat on and was pacing up and down the corridor, waiting for him."

"Did he let her go home?" whispered Miss Mattie.

"You just bet he did. Glad to get rid of her," said Miss Callahan. "But before she went, she came and stood at the foot of your bed and fidgeted as if she wanted to tell you something. Then finally she turned to me and said, 'When she wakes up, tell her it's every bit true!' That's all. Do you know what she meant? She said, 'Tell her it's all true!"

Miss Mattie nodded, and smiled happily.

True! True! She accepted it wholly and without question. Then that was what was the matter with her. The pain had gone because in God's creation there is no such thing as pain. It was what she had always wanted to believe anyway, only nobody had ever given her any encouragement. Now she had proved it for herself. The message had been left because, while the Voice spoke, the eyes of the two

sufferers had met. The proof had been made. Why question further when to believe was so wonderful?"

"By their fruits ye shall know them."

Whence came all these sayings which suddenly thronged her brain? Had the Voice spoken them, or was it memory bringing them back from her long-forgotten childhood?

Miss Mattie tried to recall what the Voice had said. Miss Callahan took the tray away and began her rounds, leaving Miss Mattie free to think.

She was surprised to find that she was not even miserable. She had wanted to die. Now she felt that life might be worth trying a while longer if only she could get away. If she could travel — perhaps move away from New York; if only she need never go back to the old sights and sounds. For several hours she lay there and thought of nothing but her own problem—her own grief. She revolved over and over her plan of getting away from things which troubled her.

Then, as if from a great distance, came a memory of the Voice. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself!"

Who was her neighbor? When she was well, she would investigate, but now it was sweet simply to lie here, free from pain. Who was her neighbor? Was her idea of herself a true one? She tried to think it out.

The child in the next cot stirred in her sleep, put her little hand to her head, and moaned.

When Miss Callahan came back, Miss Mattie pointed a weak finger.

"What's the matter with that child?" she whispered.

"Abscesses in both ears," answered the nurse. "Dr. Follansbee says the eardrums are perforated now, so she'll be deaf for life. Is n't that a pity? She's a beautiful child! Her name's Grace Rosebrook."

"Oh!" said Miss Mattie. "I'm so sorry!"

"It's a good thing somebody's sorry for her, because she's an orphan. She comes of a good family, but her father died of drink. One of the nurses told me it was her father hitting her on the ear that brought on the first abscess. Then he died, and she was neglected, and caught cold, and there you are."

"Has she no relatives?" asked Miss Mattie, trying to turn so that she could see the flushed face under the curls which lay tossed upon the pillow.

"No; she'll have to go back to the Orphan Asylum — that is, if she lives through the operation. I don't believe she will!"

"What operation?" asked Miss Mattie fearfully. Her quick breathing warned the nurse, who evaded a direct answer. Under the excitement, Miss Mattie's face was flushing. Again the child tossed her arms.

"It's a shame she has to suffer so!" said the nurse. "See, the pain's waked her up now!"

The child burst into tears.

"Can't you do something for her? I can't bear to hear her cry!" whispered Miss Mattie.

The nurse went nearer to the child.

"You bother the lady in the next bed." She used pantomime, and the child understood.

The moans ceased for a moment. Then a sweet, rather plaintive, voice said gently:

"I can put my head under the bedclothes, so she won't hear me. But I can't help crying! I can't!"

"Oh, oh!" murmured Miss Mattie in a weak tone. "Don't tell her that, nurse! She does n't bother me. I only want her suffering to end."

"Well, it can't end just now," said the nurse.

"What a wonderfully sweet voice she has," said Miss Mattie.

"It won't stay sweet long," answered the nurse. "Deaf people's voices change and grow metallic, because they can't hear how they ought to sound."

Miss Mattie was silent a few moments. The Voice seemed to speak, "In God's creation there is no pain!" Miss Mattie opened her eyes.



"Nurse, would you mind drawing her cot and mine close together? Even if she can't hear me, I could hold her little hand in mine and, maybe, to know some love was here would help her to bear the pain."

The nurse stared.

"You are n't very strong, Miss Mattie. Do you think it would be good for you?"

Miss Mattie smiled, and her thin, pale face took on a new beauty as she whispered: "I don't think giving out a little love can hurt anybody. Anyhow, I'm willing to try it. Then you could get some rest."

The nurse's hard face relaxed.

"You're a good soul, Miss Mattie!" she said. "You're the first one in this hospital that ever thought of my needing a rest. Gracie, look! I'm going to move your bed over—so! And this lady will hold your hand and maybe the pain in the poor little ears won't seem quite so bad! There now! Just look at her face when she smiles! She can't hear a word that I'm saying, but she knows something nice is going to happen to her."

As the two hospital cots became one, the redbrown eyes of Miss Mattie, dim with grief, and the lustrous violet eyes of the beautiful child met. The nurse had lifted Miss Mattie,—too weak to turn herself,—enabling her to face her little neighbor, and then, eager to be gone, she left them there together.

From that first glance Miss Mattie's sensitive soul understood the heart hunger expressed in the shy, tremulous smiles of the child, and she held out her thin arms as instinctively as she drew her breath.

Grace was able to move, and without a question she transferred her small body to the bed of the strange lady, who pillowed the child's bandaged head upon her breast, with the love none but childless mothers know. Her white, bony hands smoothed the hot forehead and flushed cheeks with a touch as light as moth wings, and her trembling voice hummed a slumber song into deaf ears which nevertheless — heard.

Suddenly something in Gracie's mind seemed to snap — her unnatural effort at self-repression possibly — for with a sob she crept closer and buried her face in Miss Mattie's neck, whispering: "Don't let them take me back to the Home!"

"I won't!" said Miss Mattie valiantly. A rush of mother-love swept over her as she clasped the soft body of the child in her arms. This was life! This was love! Larry had been taken away from her, to be sure, but her hunger to love could be appeased after all. She clasped the child closer. If no one else wanted her, why could not Miss Mattie have her? And why not others

whose need would be equally great? There were plenty of shepherds for the well and happy, but could she not have those whose strength flagged, or those who for any reason could not keep up with the flock? The wonder of the thought took away her breath.

This was her neighbor!

She saw her work cut out for her. She would not shirk or run away. She would stay, and search out for the suffering that message the Voice had left with her. There was a Heavenly Father, whose name was Love, and she had His assurance that in His creation there was no pain!

She whispered these words to the child in her arms.

Gracie could not hear what she said, but she understood the clasp of Miss Mattie's arms, and under the soothing influence of her new-found love the tension of her little nervous body relaxed. When Miss Callahan returned at the end of an hour she found them asleep in each other's arms.

"Well, if I ever!" muttered the nurse, hurriedly putting the child back into her own bed and pushing the cots apart. Miss Mattie lifted a weak hand in protest.

"I'd be fired if any one saw this!"

For the next few days life was a little brighter for both invalids. It was something to know

that near by, in the very next bed, was that intangible something which every human heart craves.

Gracie's fear and pain palpably diminished under Miss Mattie's continued declaration that she should not be taken to the Home, while the sick woman's own strength increased under the stimulus of her new-born idea.

One day, about two weeks later, Mrs. Galloway called and brought her a bunch of violets and some chicken broth.

"If you don't mind," said Miss Mattie, "I'll give the flowers to this child. She's deaf and can't hear us, but she'll be glad to have them."

"Sure, give 'em to her!" cried Mrs. Galloway heartily. "Give her some of the broth, too. I'll bring you some more to-morrow. Say! Ain't she beautiful! What's her head tied up for?"

"They say her father abused her after her mother died. He struck her on the ear, and it caused abscesses. She'll be deaf for life, he says, but I know better!"

"My Lord! Ain't that the *crime*, though! What was the matter with him when he done it? Drink?"

"They say so!" answered Miss Mattie. "Why do you suppose they let men like that be with little helpless children?"

"I don't know! But they do, and everybody thinks it's all right," snorted Mrs. Galloway. "The way men stand by drinkers is something to make you sick. When I tried to get a divorce from my old man — there was some of his friends seen him hit me with a beer bottle and break my arm, but do you think I could get one of 'em to testify to it, and help me get my freedom? No, sir! They was all struck with sudden blindness 'n' total loss o' mem'ry! He beat me for twelve years!"

"Then how did you get it?" asked Miss Mattie.

"I never did get it. He died, thank God! And the first time I'd laughed in years was under my borrowed crêpe veil, when I reelized he was nailed up in that long black box and could n't get out!"

"Oh!" cried Miss Mattie.

"What're you 'ohin' about?" demanded Mrs. Galloway. "He killed my baby before it was born, and I never had another. There's a husband for you!"

Miss Mattie drew in her breath sharply. Mrs. Galloway's usually kind face hardened as she thought over her wrongs. Then she realized her mission, and brightened.

"Well, there! I did n't come to pester you with my dead-and-gone troubles. I come to tell you the news. I've tended store since you

was laid up, and I've sold every hat in th' place! I cleared up most two hundred dollars for you."
Miss Mattie smiled.

"I'll bet you're thinkin' that you wished you could see me sellin' them hats!" laughed Mrs. Galloway. "Well, I did n't pertend nothin'. I just out 'n' said, 'Miss Morningglory's laid up in th' hospital with fever, 'n' I'm only a neighborwoman that don't know no more about the milliner business than a rabbit, but I know her prices 'n' if you can suit yourself, go ahead 'n' try on! I'll take the money to her, 'cause she sure needs it.' So then they'd wait on themselves 'n' I'd lie to 'em, just same as I s'pose you always had tuh, 'n' tole 'em they looked beautiful when it pretty nigh stunned me just to watch the chorus-girl effects th' fattest an' oldest would pick out. But I sold th' hats! Now I wisht you'd hurry 'n' get well 'n' make some more-You ain't listenin' to me! What's on yer mind?"

Miss Mattie started.

"I'll tell you, Mrs. Galloway," she said. "Come over here where Gracie can't see our lips move. Now listen. I heard the doctors talking this morning about operating on her. It seems there's a very delicate operation that can be performed, but it goes so close to the brain that ninety-five per cent are fatal. She's an orphan, with nobody to tell them not to. Now—"



But Mrs. Galloway's large face had turned turkey red, and her usually mild brown eyes snapped fire.

"Goin' to operate on her, are they?" she breathed. "Well, I guess they ain't! If you think you could stand bein' carried down to a taxicab, I guess home would be about the best place for you. But how'll we get Gracie? Ain't it yer idea to take her? I got a kittie I'll give her!"

"Oh, Mrs. Galloway, of course it is! I was so afraid you would n't help. Leave it to Miss Callahan. She can't bear Dr. Follansbee—he scolds her when she forgets to mark our charts. She'll fix it for us. Just step into that corridor and call her."

When Miss Callahan was called, she listened with interest to Miss Mattie's plan. But she dismissed the idea of secrecy with a wave of her hand.

"It won't be necessary," she declared. "You just speak up and tell him you want to adopt Gracie. Mrs. Galloway and I are witnesses. Speak up real brisk, because they decided they 'd operate to-morrow, and Gracie would n't have known a thing about it. They were n't going to tell her. Just lay the little thing on the table and etherize her, and that would have been the last anybody would have known of case No. 624!"

Mrs. Galloway ground her teeth as Dr. Follans-

bee came bustling down the ward between the two rows of beds. He had black eyes and a small pointed Van Dyke beard. He was extremely proud of his even white teeth and his small hands and feet.

"Doctor!" said Miss Mattie.

He paused in his quick walk.

"Well, what is it?"

"I will soon be well enough to go home," said Miss Mattie nervously, "and I have taken such a fancy to this child, Grace Rosebrook, that I would like to adopt her. This lady, Mrs. Galloway, will tell you that I've got a good business, and I can take care of her."

Mrs. Galloway opened her black shopping bag and produced a roll of bills.

"I've collected this much out o' her store just since she was laid up," she remarked carelessly. "If you care to go right to work, Miss Mattie, we can make this much before Easter. But maybe you 'n' Gracie would be wantin' to go South. Huh?"

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Follansbee, in no way impressed. "This child must be operated on. She is not able to leave."

"Let's ask her!" suggested Mrs. Galloway. "I'll write it, seein' she's deef!"

"No, no!" insisted Dr. Follansbee. "Don't frighten her. It is not necessary to tell her.



She'll be all right after the operation. You may have her then!"

"From what I heard this morning, I guess the undertaker will have her then!" said Miss Mattie, sitting up. "You did n't think I heard—"

"We didn't care whether you heard," said Dr. Follansbee carelessly. "There is no secret about it."

"Well, then, you won't care if I tell the reporters. One of 'em was here to see me this morning to ask how I liked hospital life, and to get my impressions. I'll tell him about Gracie."

Dr. Follansbee's face flushed. He stroked his beard.

"Well, now, I would n't do that," he said, his belligerent air melting into a smile meant to pacify. "We have had about all we want of the newspapers' interference. Newspapers do not understand about these necessary operations. But I can explain to you why it would be highly beneficial to perform this one. The child is hopelessly deaf—both eardrums perforated—and the formation of new abscesses is almost a certainty. Nothing in the world is more painful than an abscess in the ear. Now then, suppose the child of some wealthy woman—or a child of this lady here—could be sated because we had operated on a bit of human flotsam. Would n't that be worth while?"

"No!" cried Miss Mattie, while Mrs. Galloway's indignant, asthmatic breathing sounded like a locomotive. "A thousand times no! There's no necessity for operations — cutting people open just out of curiosity. If you can't make people well by prayer —"

"By what?" asked the doctor in astonishment.

"By the way a certain man named Jesus Christ did — maybe you might have heard His name in your travels!" said Miss Mattie with a feeble attempt at sarcasm. Her eyes were shining, her breast heaving. "He left instructions how to cure people that the doctors had all tried their hands on and failed."

"And do you propose to cure this child by His methods?" inquired the doctor, smiling.

"Why not?" demanded Miss Mattie. "I've heard of people doing it, and I've often wanted to try. And certainly this would be a good case to begin on."

Mrs. Galloway's mouth opened wider and wider during this colloquy, and she looked wildly from the doctor to the nurse, to see if they were hearing the same things she was. Then her anxiety centered on Miss Mattie. Mrs. Galloway had hoped — indeed, she had understood — that the delirium had left Miss Mattie, yet here she was, raving of impossible things one minute and talking of going home the next.

Dr. Follansbee regarded Miss Mattie with amusement.

"How do you propose to go about it?" he inquired.

"I don't know!" answered Miss Mattie. "I have n't read up very lately on the way He did. But I can find out, and do it the same way. It is one of His promises."

The doctor laughed heartily. Also he saw his way to yielding gracefully, without the appearance of having been beaten into submission by the threat of exposure.

"Very well, Miss Morningglory!" he said, turning away. "If the Asylum authorities agree you may have the child to experiment on. Let me know, however, if your method will heal perforated eardrums, for there is no sort of doubt that my diagnosis is correct. I'll never back down from that. I'll take off my hat to you if you succeed. File your application in writing and I'll see that she is properly dismissed from us and turned over to you. By the time you are able to leave, if there is no hitch, the red tape will be done with and you may have her."

When the doctor, still smiling, as if at some excellent bit of humor, had passed on, the three women instinctively looked in the direction of Grace's cot, and there met the curiously intelligent gaze of her great eyes.

"No!" cried Miss Mattie, while Mrs. Galloway's indignant, asthmatic breathing sounded like a locomotive. "A thousand times no! There's no necessity for operations — cutting people open just out of curiosity. If you can't make people well by prayer—"

"By what?" asked the doctor in astonishment.

"By the way a certain man named Jesus Christ did — maybe you might have heard His name in your travels!" said Miss Mattie with a feeble attempt at sarcasm. Her eyes were shining, her breast heaving. "He left instructions how to cure people that the doctors had all tried their hands on and failed."

"And do you propose to cure this child by His methods?" inquired the doctor, smiling.

"Why not?" demanded Miss Mattie. "I've heard of people doing it, and I've often wanted to try. And certainly this would be a good case to begin on."

Mrs. Galloway's mouth opened wider and wider during this colloquy, and she looked wildly from the doctor to the nurse, to see if they were hearing the same things she was. Then her anxiety centered on Miss Mattie. Mrs. Galloway had hoped — indeed, she had understood — that the delirium had left Miss Mattie, yet here she was, raving of impossible things one minute and talking of going home the next.



CHAPTER IV

MRS. GALLOWAY DESCRIBES PRAYER

NEVER had the back room of Miss Mattie Morningglory's millinery establishment looked so inviting as when some two weeks later the two invalids, leaning on Mrs. Galloway, walked slowly into it.

But while they all three were resting, and before anything could be said, except a broken exclamation of relief from Miss Mattie, Mrs. Galloway ran her fingers under the strings of her bonnet as if they choked her, and said in a worried tone, "Land sakes, Miss Mattie, why did n't you tell me you was religious?"

"I don't know as I am," said Miss Mattie,

"Well, what d' you call promisin' to heal like Jesus done!" demanded Mrs. Galloway indignantly. "Now I pray, I've always prayed, but I don't call myself religious, 'cause I never got an answer to my prayers in my life, and to be reely religious you got tuh have some encouragement."

"Then why do you pray?" asked Miss Mattie crisply.

"Why, Miss Mattie Morningglory!" exclaimed Mrs. Galloway. "It's respectable to pray. I was teached to pray by my mother. She was great on prayer. She was always asked to pray in prayer meetin'. I remember her tellin' oncet that when there was a scant attendance and nobody 'd testify, she took the floor and prayed for forty-seven minutes, without even stoppin' to cough! My father was a circuit-rider, 'n' he was considered to have the best wind of any preacher in his county. He'd just fairly roll up his sleeves, you might say, before he'd begin."

"Did either of them ever get any answers to their prayers?" asked Miss Mattie with interest. She leaned her chin in her hand and propped her elbow on her knee.

"I don't b'lieve they did, 'cause I think they was too smart to expect 'em," said Mrs. Galloway. "But what do yuh keep harpin' on answers to prayers fur? Ain't it enough just to pray, if people know you make a practice of it, and respect you accordingly?"

"No, it is n't!" said Miss Mattie. "Jesus got answers, and I'm going to get them, too!"

"How're yuh goin' to do it?" asked Mrs. Galloway in alarm.

"I don't know! I'm just going to take Him at His word. I'm going to heal Gracie's deafness."

"My land, Miss Mattie, you give me the creeps! I don't b'lieve the fever's out o' your brain yet. It's left you queer!"

Miss Mattie looked at Gracie and smiled. "We are God's children!" she said. She stood directly in front of her and spoke distinctly. "Don't you want to come into the other room and look around? Come right along. You are well and strong now. Remember that. And this is your home!"

The child smiled, and her face in its nun-like halo of white bandages looked very sweet and happy, albeit now and then pain would whiten her cheeks or a smothered cry would burst from her lips at an unusually cruel twinge.

"God never created pain!" whispered Miss Mattie to herself, "and if He did n't, we don't have to bear it!"

"My, are n't these rooms big!" exclaimed Gracie.

Miss Mattie smiled absently. In imagination, she could see every hat-holder supporting an Easter creation, which had grown in her mind while she lay in the hospital and planned how she might, in her new-found reliance on Immanuel, dare to seize a bit of human flotsam drifting on its way to death, and bring it home to life and health.

Mrs. Galloway followed. She was in striking contrast to Miss Mattie, who was tall and thin, with auburn hair and reddish-hazel eyes.

Mrs. Galloway was slow and ponderous. She

MRS. GALLOWAY DESCRIBES PRAYER 65

had large, pendulous cheeks, mild brown eyes, gentle and contemplative. She was of enormous bulk, which, in a wrapper, seemed to give her the shape of a large tree which had been sawed off six feet from the ground. But when she was dressed, this soft bulk obediently molded itself to a pair of stays, but trembled when she walked, and billowed and threatened to overflow the top of its artificial restraint each time she stooped or bent.

She was clumsy, too, whereas Miss Mattie was as nimble and surefooted as a cat. Mrs. Galloway was one of those women who, although there might be plenty of room, would sway so close to the table that she would pull the cloth askew with her hips, or in trying to open a door would rub her shoulders against a picture on the wall and leave it aslant.

She was a woman of large and generous affections, tolerant of all forms of sin until they reached an acute stage, when all her previous gentleness seemed to harden into adamant.

She was genuinely fond of Miss Mattie, and thoroughly respected her, but Mrs. Galloway's intelligence was limited, so that she viewed her neighbor's new plans with apprehension, if not actual alarm. She reverted to the subject, dragging Miss Mattie's attention from the contemplation of asking the landlord for new paint and paper.



"How're you goin' to begin?" asked Mrs. Galloway.

"Begin what?" asked Miss Mattie.

"This here healin' business."

"Well," said Miss Mattie, "there was a lady in the hospital who knew how. She said it was all in the New Testament. She said Jesus called Himself The Way. If that's true, I'm going to follow Him. I'm going to hunt up the way Jesus prayed, and stick to it till I get the answers He did! There must be something wrong with the way we pray or we surely would get answers. Now, when your father prayed, how did he begin?"

Mrs. Galloway seated herself, spread her knees apart in order to be quite comfortable, laid a hand on each knee, and turned her mind thoughtfully back to her childish impressions of an interesting subject.

"Well, I recollect he always counted on about ten minutes devoted to describing the power and awful majesty of God — complimentin' Him, you might say, as a starter. Then he would put up a powerful plea to ward off the wrath of God, wrastlin' with Him not to smite us offen the face of the earth, as He could do easy if He was amind to. But when Pa got to drawin' a picture of the afflictions the Lord sent on His children, he could do it fit to make you cry, 'cause he'd always bring in about the dead and git the mourners to weepin'. He usta declare God took our loved ones out of kindness to us, to draw us closter to Him in our grief. I rec'lect one woman, that had just lost two childern the same day of scarlet fever, got up and marched out of church oncet when he got to that part. Said afterwards she would n't set there and listen to praise of no such heathenish God as that. But Pa never paused. He went right on and prayed that her heart might be softened and she be led to see the rod of affliction bud and blossom like the rose. I was only a child, but I can remember them prayers of Pa's as plain as day. I'll bet I could say some of 'em, word for word, for when Pa got hold of one that would move the congregation to tears he hung on to it, and used it, till it or them was wore out. Then he'd feel around till he got a new line on 'em! I tell you, them was great prayers!"

Miss Mattie listened with deep attention; then she shook her head and sighed.

"What are you sighin' fer?" asked Mrs. Galloway.

"I was sighing because I thought it was no wonder your father did n't get answers to prayers, if he thought God was like that."

"Was like what?" demanded Mrs. Galloway. "Ain't everybody's idears of God the same?" "No, they are n't," declared Miss Mattie.

PROPERTY

OF THE

NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY



"I'm sure your father thought of God as a glorified man — an old man with a long white beard, and only two ears to hear all the billions and billions of prayers going up to Him night and day, and eyes like searchlights on a battleship — to see through doors and stone walls and under the bed, where scared children hide to get away from Him. Ain't that so?"

"Well, I reckon it is," admitted Mrs. Galloway. "That's about what I think He is. Can't you just see Him sittin' on a great white throne, clad in white raiment that shines like the sun, and s'rounded by angels?"

"No, I can't!" said Miss Mattie. "I believe God is right here in this room. I believe this room is full of nothing but God!"

Mrs. Galloway's nearsighted brown eyes roved anxiously from floor to ceiling and from corner to corner.

"And I believe God never sent affliction on His children," Miss Mattie went on. "You would n't give one of your children smallpox, or kill it, no matter what it had done. Now do you know any man in his senses mean enough to cut off his son's legs or paralyze his daughter for life, or that, if he did, would dare let the neighbors hear him say he had done it because he loved them and wanted to draw their attention from their sleds and dolls and fix their love on him?"

"'Course not!" cried Mrs. Galloway indignantly. "And I do think, Miss Mattie, that such a description of our Heavenly Father is blasphemious!"

"It's not blasphemous a mite!" said Miss Mattie valiantly. "In my opinion it's a heap more blasphemous to get the idea of God that makes you think it will tickle His vanity if you spend the first ten minutes of your prayer jollying Him, so He'll forget to hurl the lightning He's got His hand all ready to hurl, the minute you come into His mind. And I believe most of this worm-of-the-dust business, and calling ourselves miserable sinners, is done just so God will think we are too low down to need swatting! Most people get ready to duck their heads the minute they think of God's attention being brought to They'd count themselves pretty lucky, those that think He sends afflictions on us because He loves us 'most to death,— I say, they'd think themselves lucky if He'd get careless and forget 'em for a month or two, and leave them in possession of their families and flocks and herds."

Mrs. Galloway lifted her bulk with surprising swiftness. Her large, pendulous cheeks were deeply crimson.

"Miss Mattie Morningglory," she said in tones which trembled with emotion, "I bin your friend through sorrer and sickness, 'n' if I did n't think



your trouble over that there young man of yourn had turned your brains I'd quit you, on account of your owdacious blasphemious remarks about the Lord God Jehovah. As it is, I'm goin' tuh go cook your supper, 'cause you ain't no more fit to cook than a week-old kitten. But I begs you — do not talk to me no more about your kind of religion, 'cause it goes to my stommick 'n' upsets me."

Majestically Mrs. Galloway creaked from the room, knocking against a table containing three hat-holders and sending them crashing to the floor.

"Never mind, Mrs. Galloway-precious!" cried Gracie, in her high, childish treble. "I'll pick them up for you! I can!"

Mrs. Galloway turned and watched the little figure stagger across the floor, holding to whatever she could, and then, reaching the table, replace the hat-holders with nimble fingers. Mrs. Galloway looked at Miss Mattie meaningly.

"That there blessed lamb is goin' to turn out a good investment for you in more ways than one!" she said. Then she went out, muttering, "Mrs. Galloway-precious!" And if she gulped it was not with indignation, for her large, capable hand was searching blindly for her pocket, where reposed a freshly ironed handkerchief, which, after using, she always folded in the creases and carefully replaced. The last thing Miss Mattie

heard, as Mrs. Galloway rubbed her shoulders against both sides of the door as she passed through, was, "Mrs. Galloway-precious! 'N' I ain't done a single thing fer the lamb yet. But just watch me! I will!"

As she was disappearing, she turned back to say: "I'm goin' upstairs now an' get Gracie's kittie. It's a gentleman cat, so it won't be messin' around with kittens that hafta be drownded. Gracie'll like a kitten. I won't be gone a minute!"

Soon they heard her heavy tread, and back she came, carrying in her arms a half-grown Maltese cat with golden eyes.

Gracie ran to meet her and seized the cat, hungrily kissing and hugging it to its entire and sleepy-eyed satisfaction.

Mrs. Galloway beamed on the picture of the two.

"His name's Herbert — though he don't know it and won't answer to it, so you can change it if you wanta!"

"I don't want to!" answered Gracie, watching Mrs. Galloway's lips and motions. "I'll leave his name Herbert because you named him!"

"Land o' love!" muttered Mrs. Galloway. "I've got to get to work!"

And so the supper was cooked on the small gas stove, with Miss Mattie and Gracie looking on

and admiring Mrs. Galloway's skill, for she was a clean and expeditious worker, albeit she clattered everything she touched. She could not seem to calculate the distance between a lifted lid and a steaming kettle beneath, but in replacing it, the lid always fell the last inch, which was, until your fascinated eyes and ears became used to it, a trifle trying.

Supper was set on the long worktable, which was covered with white oilcloth, and Mrs. Galloway ate with them.

Gracie's eyes were a sight to see as the home feeling of this first meal in her new friend's palace penetrated her grateful mind. Her little tongue flew and she paused, every now and then, to pat Miss Mattie's hand or to squeeze the arm of Mrs. Galloway, who held still with an ecstatic expression on her large face, no matter what she was in the act of doing, whenever these spells of affection attacked the little maid.

When supper had been cleared away, the dishes washed, and the room tidied, Mrs. Galloway helped Gracie to undress, and much to the child's delight she discovered that she was to sleep with Miss Mattie on the soft, wide couch, which mysteriously pulled out and made itself into a perfectly fascinating bed.

"Shall I say my prayers, Miss Mattie-love?" she chirped.

MRS. GALLOWAY DESCRIBES PRAYER 73

"What prayer do you say?" inquired Miss Mattie. Gracie attentively watched her lips.

"I say 'Now I lay me.' Will that do?"

"No," said Miss Mattie. "I believe it's most unhealthy to go to sleep with the thought of death in your mind. Think of saying 'If I should die before I wake' just as if God was n't powerful enough to keep you alive in darkness as well as in light. No! You say 'Dear Heavenly Father, I am Thy child and for that reason I am forever safe and well. Guide my little feet into the right way to know this. Amen!"

The child obediently repeated these words, but when she turned to say good-night to Mrs. Galloway that lady had disappeared, and Miss Mattie could hear the creaking of the stairs under her disapproving and indignant tread.



CHAPTER V

THE HUSBANDLESS WOMAN

MISS MATTIE displayed admirable selfcontrol until Mrs. Galloway had gone upstairs and Gracie had fallen asleep. She drew a heavy screen around the couch bed, and for the first time she was almost glad the child was deaf, for Miss Mattie felt that her grief could not much longer be kept within bounds.

Always, heretofore, there had been the restraint of the hospital ward. But now, back again in the room where she had experienced such dear joys with Larry — where she had cooked and mended for him, where she had dreamed her dream and planned and built her air castle of wedded happiness — the memories which crowded about every familiar object well nigh crazed her.

It seemed to do her no sort of good to remind herself that Larry was a criminal, even now with shaved head and in a striped suit serving out a long sentence for his wickedness.

She forgot that. She forgot his perfidy with herself and Blanche. She forgot his brutality to both of them the night he was captured. She forgot that he was cruel enough to have forsaken her in cold blood, sooner or later, even if this catastrophe of the diamond robbery had been averted. She forgot that his real love was centered on a younger woman — a girl near his own age. She remembered only that he had offered her love — no matter if unreal or feigned! It had meant love to her, and never before had she tasted even the imitation of its glories. She remembered how tall he was! How broad in the shoulders! How blue and laughing his eyes! How his short hair curled and crinkled all over his head, and how sweet and bonny his speech! What if it were all lies, told simply to extract money from her willing purse? That could not prevent Miss Mattie's rebellious heart from almost bursting with grief and pain, or stop the tears which poured from her aching eyes.

In vain did she strive for self-control. In vain did she chide herself, aloud and with stinging, sarcastic words.

While her voice was still vibrating through the silent room her frail body was racked with agonizing sobs over the loss of her idol and the drear hopelessness of the future.

"I'm forty years old," she whispered to herself. "I shan't ever get another lover. No woman ever gets a chance after she is forty, because our looks go mostly about that time, and it seems as if men don't care about courage and kindness and faithfulness and pleasantness in a



woman, if youth and beauty have gone. I've got to give up all hope of ever being anybody's wife or - or anybody's real mother! And I would have — appreciated those positions so much! But men don't understand how to pick out wives. Other women, who don't care about such joys, have got husbands and children that they ain't even thankful for. They treat their husbands like dogs, and neglect their children, and even desert 'em! While here I am so lonely and heartbroke, because all my life I have been without them, that I could be taken in by the foolishest sort of a cheat. If I'd ever had beaux like other girls, I s'pose I'd have known better than to be so fooled. But Larry was my first my very first — so it don't even seem queer to me. though I s'pose to them that know better it's just a joke, that they can laugh at and make fun of. But oh, Heavenly Father, to me it's a heartbreak that I'll never get over as long as I live! Sometimes I think if I don't get my mind on something else soon I'll die of it yet! The child don't seem to count!"

She knelt with her head on a chair and sobbed hopelessly.

"To give it all up!" she whispered. She looked around as if ashamed to have the very walls hear, yet her agony was such that it must find expression. "To give it all up! All the joy I'd promised

myself, waiting on him, and keeping him in fine things that he could n't have afforded for himself unless he'd worked, and cooking for him, and taking care of him when he was sick! Just loving him, till I could n't see nor hear nor think of anything else! I made an idol out of him! That's what I did! I broke the first commandment. I worshiped the creature more than I did the Creator. Maybe that's why Larry was taken away from me—so I would come to my senses and remember my God. I wonder now! If that's so, there's comfort for me yet!"

The sound of a muffled sob made her start. She hurried to the couch behind the screen, and there, humped up under the covers, lay Gracie, weeping bitterly.

Miss Mattie knelt down and drew away the quilt.

"What is it, my lamb?" she said.

"Oh, my head! My ears!" wailed the child. "The pain is worse than it ever was in the hospital! It's in both sides at once."

"In God's creation there is no pain!" whispered Miss Mattie fervently. Oh, if she could only prove the words of the Voice here — now — for her suffering child! She drew Gracie into her arms.

"I can't hold still!" shrieked the child, breaking away from Miss Mattie. In her agony, she



dashed her head against the wall and tore the sheet in her teeth.

White and shaking, Miss Mattie stood up and lifted both arms above her head.

"Lord, hear my cry!" she said. "We are Thy children, and there is no pain!"

The child's sobs continued. The sound of them made Miss Mattie's voice tremble and her own tears flow, but she valiantly continued her declarations. Every word the Voice had spoken, Miss Mattie repeated. She affirmed them. She believed.

Gracie made brave efforts to still her cries.

Miss Mattie, weeping in sympathy, stooped and lifted her. She sat down with the child in her arms, and without cessation, until her voice trembled with fatigue, she continued to pray and to expect her answer.

Presently she realized that the little form was slipping into an easier position and that its rigidity had relaxed.

In a few minutes the truth dawned on her. The miracle of the hospital was repeated. The child was asleep, and the pain was gone!

This then was her answer! The Voice had done its work. With an effort, she carried the child back to the couch without waking her. She wondered at her strength, for an hour ago she shook with her own weakness.

"Strength comes when we need it," whispered Miss Mattie. She was still aghast at the wonder of the moment.

"It's all true!" she said. "She said so, and I've proved it. The answer to everything is in a Book I've had on my table all these years and never opened except Sundays. All pain, all sorrow and sighing! Maybe, if I can cure Gracie's, mine can be made so's it won't hurt quite so bad. Maybe it says something about women that have been hurt as I have. Sickness is n't all the pain there is in the world. No, nor it is n't half of it. I know I'd rather have ten sicknesses in a hospital than to be so ashamed and wounded in my spirit as I feel now. Seems as if I can't ever forget it, nor get over it. I feel as if every tongue was condemning me for being such a fool at my age, and that nothing I could ever do,—no good work I could perform, no sacrifice nor anything, would help out. That's what I call pain! Now she said in God's creation there was no pain! And I wonder if she meant — pain of any kind! If she did, it'll be put out plain, where I can find it, 'cause she said the right idea of God brought answers. That's what I'm reaching out for! Answers! And somehow I do believe going to get one!"

Somewhat calmed by her hope, she closed her eyes, and expected her answer. Then she got up,



took her Bible, and began to read. An hour passed; two. She fluttered the leaves, as if dissatisfied.

"It's got to be here!" she said. "I must search if I would find." She let the book open where it would, put her finger on a spot, then looked to see what verse she had thus selected. It was the fourth verse of the fifty-fourth chapter of Isaiah.

"'Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more."

Miss Mattie's pale cheeks flushed and her eyes brightened.

"This is my answer," she murmured. "This is for me."

"'For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called."

"My land!" gasped Miss Mattie. "Ain't that wonderful!"

She turned the gas higher and read on.

"'For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and

Miss Mattie's tears flowed fast.

"And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children."

Miss Mattie laid down the book, with an expression of absolute awe. "That's it—the children," she whispered. Her face was no longer pale, tear-stained, and faded. It was transfigured by the light of a holy purpose of self-renunciation and of implicit acceptance of this inspired call. To Miss Mattie's simple soul, this invitation and these promises were direct, personal, final—a private communication between herself and her Heavenly Father and of an intimacy never to be communicated to a human soul.

"I s'pose," she whispered, "that a woman never lived who would have loved being married as much as I. But if I've got to go through life without a husband, I can at least hold to these promises and know that I am called, as much as ever the child Samuel was. And I can have all the afflicted children that other women don't want. Maybe that's what I was put here for. Gracie is the first, but she won't be the last. God's children come fast, because they come where they're wanted. Heavenly Father, help



me to be a good mother to Thy little ones! May I never close my ears to their cry, and send straight to my door those that need me most!"

A sound made her start. There was a movement behind the screen. Then Gracie's little bandaged head came slowly into view.

"Miss Mattie-love," she piped, "are you crying?" Wondering what the child would do, Miss Mattie nodded.

In a flash the little girl's bare feet had pattered across the floor and she was in Miss Mattie's arms.

"How did you know?" asked Miss Mattie. Gracie watched her lips and understood.

"I dreamed it. I heard it just as plain! Then I opened my eyes and you weren't there, so I looked."

Miss Mattie pressed her wet handkerchief to her aching temples. Gracie saw its dampness with startled eyes.

"You are so good and beautiful and full of love, you have n't anything — really — to cry about. Everybody loves you! Even that cross Miss Callahan! And Dr. Follansbee thought so much of you, he let you have me. And Mrs. Galloway-dear just loves you most to death. And I love you so it hurts me here!"

Suddenly the child put her hands to her bandaged ears.

"Why, I forgot!" she said. "The pain is all gone! Have you been praying for me? Do you hear, Miss Mattie-dear? My ears don't hurt any more at all! You can take my bandages off. Now I know I am going to get well! I know it!"

With an expression of awe on her face, Miss Mattie looked at the Bible she had been studying. Then she set her lips in a determined fashion and removed the bandages.

"I'm not going to be surprised when God answers my prayers," she said. "I knew He would, only — well, I guess I did n't expect he'd make it quite so thorough! Come, Gracie, dear. I'm not going to cry ever again! Come on now! I'm ready for bed, too. You can cuddle down in my arms just the way you did in the hospital, and we'll both go to sleep in the everlasting arms that never fail us nor ever grow weary!"



CHAPTER VI

THE FRAR OF OLD SPROULE

JUST where Miss Mattie lived is of no consequence. Every great city contains many a milliner's shop on a humble thoroughfare, where hats blossom to suit the moderate purse, and Miss Mattie's shop was one of these.

Yet hers was a trifle different, for Miss Mattie had a keen eye for high standards and she kept up with the Fifth Avenue shops in a manner surprising to those who knew her moderate outlay.

For herself, her wants were few, but upon those she loved she spent too lavishly. For example, she had got along ten years without a bathroom on her floor, climbing two flights of stairs to an unsanitary, dark, and foul-smelling nook, lighted only by an air shaft, which served all the tenants on the floors above.

But with the advent of Gracie, she gave up a small room in which she had always stored supplies and had it made into a modern, light, sanitary bathroom, with a shower. It could be entered from the salesroom as well, so that Miss Mattie's customers inspected it, while it was in process of building, with neighborly curiosity and frank criticism. She papered it with water-proof,

tiled paper, which made it such a thing of beauty that Gracie begged to be allowed to sleep in the white tub the first night it was set in position.

The advent of the bathroom might have seemed more of an extravagance than it really was, for the rent of her two enormous rooms was quite low, and because Miss Mattie always paid in advance and was never a day behind in her payments, her landlord never raised the price.

Nor could Miss Mattie have moved if she would, for anywhere else such rooms would have cost two — yes, three — times as much, and her customers dwelt near by. To move would be to lose them and be forced to seek a new clientèle. Now Miss Mattie was shrewd in such matters, and she knew she was suited to her customers. She studied them, made hats to suit them, and they were clever enough to realize that Miss Mattie was a genius. From her, at moderate prices, they could get hats which compared favorably with any they saw on women of higher class. Miss Mattie went often to the theater, studied the windows of other milliners, and gave her friends the benefit of her brains. Her customers were her friends and her friends her customers. Therefore she was content with what she had and she settled down in her friendly street and put in a bathroom calculated to serve her for twenty years to come, should the building containing it stand that long.



Spring passed in comparative tranquillity. Gracie continued to be sweet and more lovable. The abscesses in her ears did not return, as the doctor predicted, but her hearing did not apparently improve. She still seemed to be stone deaf.

Miss Mattie studied her Bible for hours every day, and never once lost faith that her child would be healed. She confidently expected it, spoke of it as imminent, and encouraged Gracie to do the same, until one day she realized that, although the child could not hear literally, she could hear Miss Mattie's thoughts, and often answered them aloud even before Miss Mattie had voiced them. Many a time the little girl ran in from the next room, crying out in her singularly sweet and penetrating voice, "Did you call me, Miss Mattielove?" And always it was in answer to a wish on Miss Mattie's part that the child would come.

Miss Mattie once explained this to Mrs. Galloway.

"Hearing is n't through the ears, Mrs. Galloway," said Miss Mattie. "It is a wholly spiritual thing. We could have been made without any ears at all, and have heard just the same. Or —"

"Or I s'pose we could 'a' heard with our noses and seen with our ears and smelt with our mouths," responded Mrs. Galloway crisply. "You might jes' well go on, Miss Mattie. You got a way of handlin' Scripture truths that would stir up an anchovy." "Well, if I can prove it," said Miss Mattie; "you know you are n't asked to take a thing on faith. It's works with me."

"I ain't goin' to take nothin' on faith, nor works neither," asserted Mrs. Galloway obstinately, but her actions belied her words. She came down to Miss Mattie's rooms on the gauziest of excuses and argued every assertion of the milliner's with unfailing contrariness.

"Well, now, I would n't be so set, if I were you. I wish Gracie would come in, so I could show you," said Miss Mattie.

Just then the little girl ran in from outdoors.

"Did you want me, Miss Mattie-sweet?" she chirped.

Mrs. Galloway's startled eyes met Miss Mattie's.

"Well, I vow!" she said. "Did n't you have it arranged? Honest?" But her incredulity was partly assumed.

Miss Mattie shook her head.

"Oh, Miss Mattie-dear," cried Grace, "a new boy brought this paper. I asked him where Joe was, and he said he'd got so much worse he could n't get around with his papers any more. Oh, Miss Mattie-dear, can't we take him in? He is one of the lambs that can't keep up with the flock, just like me!"

"What's the matter with him, Gracie? Did he get hurt?" asked Mrs. Galloway.



The intelligent child, reading the movement of her lips, understood every word and answered.

"No, Mrs. Galloway-honey. He's got a paralysis that creeps and creeps! It's up to here now, so that's why he had to give up selling papers. He can't manage his legs any more at all."

Miss Mattie's lips were moving as Gracie talked, and on her face was the spiritual look which fascinated while it worried her upstairs neighbor.

"She's goin' to take him, sure's you're born!" murmured Mrs. Galloway to herself. "She's got the hunger-look. What'd I tell yuh?" she added, as if addressing an argumentative antagonist, when she saw Miss Mattie rise and begin to put on her hat.

"This is not as hasty as it may look," said Miss Mattie, half apologetically. "I've had my eyes on Joe for 'most two years. He's a smart boy, and well worth saving, but as long as he could help himself, I let him. He'll make a nice brother for Gracie. He's two years older, and when they get grown up he can take her out to parties, and save me going."

Mrs. Galloway got up, her eyes snapping with virtuous indignation.

"Seems to me a little impident, Miss Mattie, for you to take the Lord's work so bodaciously outa His hands and order it to suit yourself," she said. Her heavy breathing testified to her repressed feeling. "Seems to me, it would be a little more becoming in you to submit to the will of God—just occasionally, you know, so's to encourage Him to go on!—and not flaunt your opposite will in His face quite so often!"

Miss Mattie turned on her with gentle reproof.

"There you go again, Mrs. Galloway, always thinking and declaring that the will of God is affliction and sorrow and suffering and pain! Does n't the Bible tell us to prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God? Why don't you try supposing and declaring that His will is joyful and happy and healthy? Why don't you try believing that He never sent sickness?"

"How'd it get here then?" demanded Mrs. Galloway.

"It is n't here to stay!" asserted Miss Mattie. "Just as soon as we act about it the way Jesus did, it'll go. Where do you reckon your asthma went to?"

"I did n't notice that it had went anywheres," said Mrs. Galloway, looking in a startled way around the room, as if expecting to see her asthma perched on a shelf ready to hop back into her possession again on the slightest provocation.

"Well, you haven't had a spell since I read how Jesus healed the woman. He said He could n't do anything by Himself, and I can't, but I've got

the same Father He has, and it's Him that's healing Gracie and healed your asthma and will heal Joe's paralysis. I can see him—well—right now! Thank God!"

"What you whispering to yourself?" asked Mrs. Galloway suspiciously.

"I'm only giving thanks for His healing before it takes place to our mortal eyes," said Miss Mattie patiently. "When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead He said, 'Father, I thank thee that Thou hast heard me.' But you see, He had done all his asking and praying when He stayed two days in the same place where He was when He heard Lazarus was sick. So lots of my praying for Joe has already been done."

"Is that why he got worse and had to give up?" inquired Mrs. Galloway, with perfectly harmless sarcasm.

"It's why Divine Love has taken away his earthly prop so's he could fall into my arms that have been aching for him for two years," answered Miss Mattie gently. "I did n't have any excuse to ask for him while he could hop around and sell papers."

"Don't he know you want him? Ain't you ever told him you'd take him when he got worse?" asked Mrs. Galloway, driven to an unnatural suspicion by her neighbor's unworldliness.

"No, I never!" declared Miss Mattie. "I've

watched him keep with the other boys when I could see he was suffering agony. Then when his papers were sold, I've seen him go hide in the area so's nobody would see how sick and weak he was. He could n't get home till he'd rested."

"I bet I know who took him in and rested him!" said Mrs. Galloway, her kind eyes resting fiercely on Miss Mattie. She was winking violently to keep the tears back, for pain and suffering always racked her tender heart.

"What kind of a boy is it that took Joe's place?" asked Miss Mattie, hastily changing the subject.

Gracie hopped up and down, clapping her hands softly and chanting her reply.

"He's the nicest boy you ever saw! His hair is red and curly and his eyes just snap, they're so full of smartness. And he's going to grow up and be an editor. His father was an editor, but he's dead, and so is his mother."

"You goin' to bring Joe home with you?" asked Mrs. Galloway as Miss Mattie started for the door.

"Indeed I am. I think he'll be glad to come to live with us, don't you, Gracie?"

The child nodded eagerly.

"S'pose he turns out disagree ablean' hateful?" asked Mrs. Galloway, whose arguments were only voiced to be contradicted.

"Then he'll need a pleasant home all the more," asserted Miss Mattie, with a smile which seemed to include all the homeless ones of earth.

"But he'll spoil your's and Gracie's peace, if he's ugly," declared Mrs. Galloway, goaded by Miss Mattie's sunny optimism into saying more than she really feared.

"He could n't! Two people just full of God's love and joyfulness are more than a match for one boy, even if he's full of evil. Has n't the side God's on got the majority?"

"I'd like to see any one git enough of a majority to heal my old aunt of her devilishness," said Mrs. Galloway, gloomily. "She's bed-rid, but so mean I can't get nobody to stay with me more'n a week, for love nor money."

"She'll get over it," said Miss Mattie, confidently.

"I s'pose you think she'll outgrow it!" was Mrs. Galloway's retort. "She's only seventynine. She's got lots o' time!"

"There is n't such a thing as time or old age or devilishness!" declared Miss Mattie. "This very minute is all we've got. Begin to heal your aunt right now by remembering all the good, kind things she's ever done and smearing the ugly ones off the blackboard of your memory with your wet finger. You'll have her done before I come home, if you begin now."

"Sounds 's if she was cookin' in a kitchen!" smiled Mrs. Galloway.

"Sounds more as if she was being roasted in an oven," giggled Miss Mattie. "Will you look after Gracie till I come back?"

"You don't never need to ast that!" said Mrs. Galloway crossly. "I don't b'lieve that child's out o' my mind an hour durin' the day, no more 'n' she is out o' yours. So you jist go in and out as you please! And say! You need n't worry about supper. I'll have it ready for you. I ain't got a thing to do this afternoon, an' I can cook it, jes' as well as not!"

Miss Mattie smiled at her.

"Now, Mrs. Galloway," she said, "I don't mind your helping, and it's sweet of you to want to, but don't you ever clean these rooms the way you did last week. In the first place, you're too fat to go down on your hands and knees and scrub. And in the second place, I've found a woman with four children to support, that needs the work. Her name's Eisenhut, and she's just awfully poor. So I've got her engaged to clean for me all winter."

"I'll take her half a day once a week, too," said Mrs. Galloway promptly. "How many children did you say she had? An' how old are they? Hev they got warm mittens? Huh?"

"I'll tell you all about them when I come home," said Miss Mattie. "I've got to go now."

As Miss Mattie opened her door, she saw four "neighbor-women" standing in a group and talking eagerly.

They welcomed her to their circle. Mrs. Shapiro, an Italian, kept the corner fruit store. Mrs. Connor's daughter was a hairdresser next door, Mrs. Meyer, a Swiss, lived on the third floor above Miss Mattie, and Mrs. Waugh on the fourth.

"Have yez heard the news, Miss Mattie, dear?" chirped Mrs. Connor. "Old Sproule has got hold of Joe an' no wan can find out where he's hid th' lad!"

Old Sproule was a blear-eyed, professional cripple with deformed feet on short stumps of legs, who propelled himself along the sidewalk by his hands. Even grown people passed him with averted faces, and every child within sight of him could be forced into instant obedience by a threat that otherwise he would be given to old Sproule.

His actual misdeeds were unknown, but his horrible face and reported wealth were sufficient to turn him into a nameless horror. He lived in a celler which was said to be filled with corpses and barrels of gold and diamonds,— according to the imagination of the story-teller and the credulity of the infantile audience.

"I thought Joe was in the hospital," said Miss Mattie. "I was going to see him."

"Old Sproule, he tell ze children so," said Mrs. Meyer, "but I do not find him zare." Mrs. Meyer had trouble with the th sound in our language, although she spoke both French and German fluently.

"What will Sproule do with him?" asked Miss Mattie.

"Ye'd better say what will he do to th' lad!" said Mrs. Connor. "Sure, he wants him to be like himself. A deformed beggar makes a mint of money."

"Eet ees so!" declared Mrs. Shapiro. Her big black eyes and long golden earrings made of her face a brilliant contrast to the pink and white countenance and twinkling blue eyes of the little old Irishwoman.

Mrs. Meyer was brown — brown as an etching — skin, eyes, hair, even her lips were of a soft, warm brownness, even and smooth and appetizing. Her peppery temper, her warm heart, and her spicy manner of speech made her seem like a freshly baked ginger cookie.

Of them all, only Mrs. Waugh seemed not to belong to the neighbor class. She was fat and unkempt and so careless of her children that Ursula, the eldest girl, was already running the streets evenings with boys and girls of whom

her mother knew nothing, to the intense disapproval of Mrs. Meyer, who never hesitated to speak her mind on the subject.

"It would be work for ze police if we could only find where zay are," she said, her eyes snapping.

"Does n't anybody know?" asked Miss Mattie. The four women shook their heads.

"The way we discover," said Mrs. Shapiro. "Meeses Meyer, she want-a take heem something. I say I geeve fruit. Joe, he like-a da fruit. So she take-a dis lill basket I feex for heem. But he not there!"

"But who says Sproule's got him?" asked Miss Mattie, suspecting a children's made-up story.

"The big boy Joe sold out to," said Mrs. Waugh.

"I wish we could find him," said Mrs. Shapiro.

"Find him!" cried Mrs. Meyer. "We must find him! And before it is too late!"

Mrs. Shapiro shook her head at her. Miss Mattie saw it.

"Why, will he hurt him?" she asked in terror.

The women exchanged glances. Harrowing details that they might discuss among themselves piecemeal, they carefully concealed from Miss Mattie, without exactly realizing why. If anybody had asked the reason, they would probably have responded vaguely that Miss Mattie couldn't stand things.

"Joe, he get-a 'long awright," said Mrs. Shapiro, cheerfully. She smiled reassuringly. But Miss Mattie was not to be taken in.

"I'm going to find him!" she declared.

"What you going to do wiss him?" asked Mrs. Meyer. "I zink you find him very sick."

Miss Mattie looked at her.

"You need n't be afraid to tell me. What is it?"

"Well," began Mrs. Shapiro, and stopped.

"I tell you," began Mrs. Meyer. "We're afraid old Sproule will — will cripple ze boy — make him like himself — only worse!"

Miss Mattie turned so white, Mrs. Shapiro put out her arm.

"Oh!" breathed Miss Mattie. "Oh! Oh!"

She whirled around and looked up the street. "I'm going to bring Joe home with me," she cried.

"Here?" asked Mrs. Waugh.

"I'm going to adopt him! Just like Gracie!" she said.

"Adopt him!" repeated the women.

"And I have n't got a minute to lose!"

"Saints preserve us!" gasped Mrs. Connor.
"Th' dear woman's crazy wit th' heat!"

"He'd be alone now," said Mrs. Meyer. "Old Sproule comes by here every evening about six."

Miss Mattie paid no attention. In her ignorance of old Sproule's character, she was not

afraid of him for herself. She only feared for Joe. In her terrified mind's eye she could only see the helpless lad at the savage mercy of the drunken villain, and her heart beat in terror.

At the corner she almost ran into the new boy.

He stopped at once, in an eager way, as if he had something to say. Then he paused, and waited for her to begin. Later on, Miss Mattie remembered this cautious holding in check of impulse.

"Boy," she said.

"My name is Bob Avery, Miss Mattie," he said.

"Do you know where Joe is?" asked Miss Mattie.

The boy looked down.

"Miss Mattie, if you had promised not to tell a thing, yet you knew you ought to tell, what would you do?"

"I think—I hope I'd keep my word," said Miss Mattie, "but I don't know. I have n't got much confidence in myself when it comes to be a matter of what's good for a person. I wish I had more honor, but I have n't got much of that kind. I'd tell! What are you going to do?"

The boy hesitated.

"I don't believe I can tell," he said finally; "I feel something inside that won't let me."

"Hm!" said Miss Mattie. "That decision of yours would tell me you were going to be a man, if I'd seen you a week-old baby!" she said.

Bob Avery laughed.

"At a week old I might not be saying it!" he said.

"I want to find Joe!" Miss Mattie said abruptly.

"He's awfully sick," said Bob. "Old Sproule gets drunk every night and threatens to cut off Joe's legs and arms so's he'll be like him — only worse. Us boys heard it. So we waited till the old man went out, then we hid Joe and promised him not to tell anybody. He's scared 'most to death."

"How did Sproule come to get him, so's he could beat him?" asked Miss Mattie.

"Why, Joe's always lived with him," said Bob.

"Joe lives with old Sproule?" cried Miss Mattie.
"Then he's in danger all the time! He's afraid!
That's what's the matter with him!"

Miss Mattie faced her problem.

"Tell you what," she said eagerly, "you go ask Joe if he won't let you tell me — Miss Mattie Morningglory! Tell him I want to take him home with me — to live! Tell him I'll never let old Sproule get hold of him again!"

The cumulative excitement in Bob Avery's face was a sufficient testimony to his acquiescence.

Without another word he dashed away. Miss Mattie looked around for somewhere to wait, but before she could decide, Bob was back.

"I darsn't go near him now, Miss Mattie,"

he panted. "The old man's found out Joe's gone and he's watching me. I'll bet he suspects what's happened."

"What'll we do?" asked Miss Mattie. "Is Joe too sick to be moved? Is he in any pain?"

"Well, he's pretty bad. I can't tell just how sick he is. He's a game little rooster — that's why us boys cottoned to him. I tell you what I could do. The old man's full, and I can see he's going to follow me. I could take him in the wrong direction and the other boys could get Joe to your flat."

"That's real smart of you, Bob Avery!" and Miss Mattie's eyes beamed her flattering appreciation of masculine ingenuity. "Can the boys get him there comfortably? If they can't, I'll call a Red Cross ambulance. You need n't let me know where it's to be sent if it's against your conscience."

"He's right near the hospital where you were!" said Bob.

"Then get an ambulance from there!" said Miss Mattie quickly. "I'll pay whatever is charged. I'll pay in advance, if they want it. You make the arrangements, and get that boy into my back room to-night."

Bob, who knew the habits of ambulances from following them, promised obedience and darted away, before Miss Mattie could add a word.

CHAPTER VII

THE RESCUE OF JOE CAMPBELL

AS MISS MATTIE walked slowly home, thinking intently over her problem, she was vaguely aware of an unusual amount of observation. Shopkeepers hurried to the door to see her pass, and women trundling perambulators nodded and smiled and then whispered vociferously.

Evidently the neighbor-women had already spread the news that Miss Mattie was going to take care of the paralyzed boy.

When she reached her own door she did not go in. Instead, she did some necessary buying in near-by shops, and waited outside for the arrival of the ambulance.

She waited an hour, and no ambulance came. She was beginning to grow uneasy, when an excited boy whom she had never seen before darted up to her, panting.

"Come quick, Miss Mattie! Old Sproule got on to Bob's game and he's tryin' to kill both the kids!"

Before the words were out of his mouth, Miss Mattie had started on a run. She never knew before that she *could* run. The boy at her side jerked out the main facts in disjointed breaths.

"Bob was goin' to get him away — the old man

— but the minute he seen Bob, he went for him. He give him an awful beatin', to try to make him tell. But he would n't. Then —"

"Yes, yes! Then?" panted Miss Mattie.

"Then," gulped the boy, "he set down on the curb and laffed, 'n' told Bob he knew where Joe was. 'N' he did! 'N' he'd already been there 'n' licked Joe again."

"Oh!" cried Miss Mattie, wringing her hands. "Oh, oh! How terrible! Is it much farther? I—I'm getting such a stitch in my side—I can hardly—breathe!"

"See where that kid is? It's just there! I told him to keep watch."

Encouraged by the short distance, Miss Mattie kept on. She went more slowly, her hand on her aching side.

When she reached the door, a low, evil-looking entrance into blackness, she did not see the astonished glance she received from a man who happened to be passing.

"Who is that lady?" asked the man, as Miss Mattie disappeared.

Half a dozen voices piped her name.

"She's gone in there to get a lame boy away from old Sproule. She's goin' to 'dopt him 'n' cure him, so's he can walk!"

"Who is old Sproule?" he asked.

"He's a bad man — awful rich — that walks

like this! He's locked one of us fellers in a room upstairs, and soon as he comes down he's goin' to kill Joe. He says he'll eat him raw, with a little salt!"

The eyes of the story-teller bulged with terror.

The stranger nodded his head slowly several times.

"Perhaps it would be just as well —"

He took his heavy walking stick by the ferule, bent his tall head, and entered the low door.

At the end of a dark passage he heard voices, whose sound he followed.

Foul odors, the smell of unclean flesh, the sickening odor of poverty which does not care mingled here, but from the midst of these came the sound of a woman's voice of unmistakable sweetness, and of a boy's repressed sobs.

"It's being afraid, Joe dear," the woman's voice was saying. "I've come to take you away where you won't have anything to be afraid of—ever again. You'll come with me, won't you?—Why not? Why won't you come?"

"He — he'd kill me!" stammered the boy.

"Oh, no, he would n't! God's your Father! God'll take care of you!"

"Yes, he would! He came near it, last night. If it had n't been for Bob—"

The man in the corridor drew back to let a hideous object pass — a dwarfed human scuttling

down from the stairway like a land crab, propelling himself by his hands, and uttering in a low voice the vilest curses. With upraised stick, the tall man followed softly.

It was Joe's high-pitched scream of terror which made Miss Mattie jump. But before the blow of old Sproule could descend upon the prostrate lad, the gnarled knob of a man's loaded walking stick had laid the crippled monster senseless at their feet.

Then, without a word, the stranger gathered the helpless boy in his strong arms and hurried out through the narrow hall to the street, Miss Mattie following.

At the door he paused and whistled sharply at a passing vehicle of the genus hack.

Still without a word, Miss Mattie got in, the boy was placed beside her, and the man lifted his hat. As his back was toward the light, Miss Mattie could not see his face.

"Good-by, brave woman!" he said. "You are quite safe now. I must go back and attend to my silent friend. I'll see to it that he does not annoy you and the lad again, so sleep in peace, and — my hat is off to you! You came near being killed, but you were too brave to know it."

"I can't ever forget what you did," said Miss Mattie simply. "I can't ever get used to the quickness of God's ways."

"Of whose ways?"

"Of God's. He sent you there to help me!" said Miss Mattie.

"Ah!" said the man, smiling. "Possibly He did. We will let it go at that."

He closed the door, which would not stay closed. He slammed it. The driver climbed down, threw his weight against the door, and conquered its obstinacy. The gentleman thrust a bill into his hand and gave him some directions. Then the tall stranger spoke through the open window.

"This man will carry the lad for you, wherever you want him taken," he said. "Good-by again!"

He beckoned to the group of excited newsboys, who were hopping around like kernels of popcorn.

"To the rescue!" he said. "Where is our young friend concealed?"

Joe heard, and smiled in beatific content, but Miss Mattie was too occupied to notice and Joe did not remind her. It was one of his uninherited, tender ways, which afterwards Miss Mattie came to know.

While all this was going on, the back room of the millinery shop was in process of preparation for the expected guest.

The whole house heard of Miss Mattie's intention, and Mrs. Knobloch on the top floor at once got out an old Morris chair and had it carried



down the back-stairs to Miss Mattie's rooms. Mrs. Knobloch lived with her son Steenie and his wife Leila. Steenie was proofreader on the Star and much respected therefor, and his mother, who mixed her English and German in a puzzling manner, was one of the few who declared without reservation that Miss Mattie's ideas of healing as the New Testament directed were perfectly plausible and possible here and now. In her broken English she told of wonderful cures she had known in Germany, and the dear old lady would have repeated these stories to Mrs. Galloway, when she followed the Morris chair to explain its use, if Mrs. Galloway could have understood her. As it was, Mrs. Galloway asked her in pantomime to enter, as if she were a deaf mute and spoke no language at all.

Mrs. Knobloch smiled and pointed to the chair.
"It is for Joe," she said. "Ich denk die fratilein hat forgessen dot a bed vould be needed schnell!"

Mrs. Galloway looked from Mrs. Knobloch's beaming face to the comfortable chair, and smiled. Then she said in that loud tone of voice which contains more knowledge of English than a softer one. "I don' know what 'schnell' means, but it was very good of you—good, you know—"
"Ja, ich versteh 'goot'!" nodded the old woman.

"Well, it was good of you to think of the chair I'll tell Miss Mattie how kind you were!" shouted Mrs. Galloway.

"Nein, it iss nod me dot iss kind," struggled the old German lady. "It iss der lieber Gott, who puts it in mein hertz—" she laid her hand on her heart—

"Uh huh! In your heart!" beamed Mrs. Galloway.

"Ja! To help His schildern! Die liebes fraülein!"

"Land sakes! I wisht I knew what she is sayin'," groaned Mrs. Galloway. "I'm all in a sweat, tryin' to make her out." Then she shouted, "What is a 'leepus froyline'?"

"It iss 'dear young lady'! Iss she not? Fraülein Mattie?"

"She sure is! Just as 'leepus' as they make 'em!" answered Mrs. Galloway.

But their conversation was put to an end by the cries of Gracie, who was flattening her nose against the glass in the front door.

"Here they come! Here they come!"

There was plenty of excitement as the aged hack rattled up to the curb, but it was of a silent kind. The neighbors, the newsboys, even the children, were of that sad sort who know sorrow better than joy, so that in every crisis they first anticipated evil. Therefore they were not going



to exclaim until they knew what had happened.

But when they saw the driver climb down, pry open the door, and, with one foot on the step, reach in for Joe, and realized that the crippled boy was still alive and safe in Miss Mattie's care, an excited cheer burst forth, which brought the red into the cheeks of both Miss Mattie and Joe, and a grin to the red-faced driver.

He carried the boy in through the salesroom to the great, light, airy back room which was to be the prostrate lad's home for many months to come.

"Put him here!" cried Mrs. Galloway, pointing to the Morris chair. Her cheeks were trembling with suppressed excitement, and as was usual when she was agitated she kept her hands folded under her apron and only released one when necessity demanded. "Mrs. Knobloch's just sent it down. She says he can keep it!"

Miss Mattie was not a demonstrative woman, but, without a word, she went up to the whitehaired old lady and kissed her fresh pink cheek, which grew pinker with embarrassment and pleasure.

The driver grunted as he stooped to put Joe in the chair. But he grinned. Then he looked around the room, taking in all its crisp cleanliness and its unutterable air of home, and said, "Now then, young feller! You get well! You hear?"

"I will!" said Joe. "Thank you for lifting me!"

"The pleasure is mine!" laughed the driver, taking off his hat with a flourish. He was chewing tobacco, his teeth were yellow, his hands indescribably dirty, but his contagious cheerfulness made them all smile.

Miss Mattie dived down in her shopping bag and produced a half dollar, which she held out to him.

"All paid for! Signed, sealed, and delivered!" said the driver, waving it aside. He drew the back of his hand across his mouth, playfully struck at the boy with his old soft hat, then swung out of the room, with a backward wave of the hand which included them all in a universal brotherhood of good will and friendliness.

"Was n't he nice?" said Mrs. Galloway, as the front door slammed behind him.

Gracie was hopping up and down, dancing in her excitement and smiling in the utmost content.

They all gathered around Joe, beaming on him and trying not to notice his embarrassment at their observation.

Mrs. Shapiro came in, ostensibly with some grapes for the children, but in reality to see how things were.

While she was there, Mrs. Connor and her daughter Maggie, the hairdresser, called and

Mrs. Meyer brought down a plate of the small cakes Swiss children have when they are good.

Better manners obtain in scenes like this than elsewhere in the great world, for while the neighbor-women were fairly a-quiver with curiosity, they would not ask a question before Joe which might tend to excite or embarrass him.

"I'll tell you all about it, soon's I get a chance," murmured Miss Mattie to the Connors, who nodded in silence.

Gracie, still hopping, was chanting softly to herself. The boy watched her smilingly.

"She's on springs, is n't she?" he said.

He leaned back, sighing with comfort. His face began to lose its drawn look and to gain a faint color.

"Oh, oh! He's hungry! He smells supper cooking!" cried Gracie. "He's working his nose just like a rabbit. Hurry, Mrs. Galloway-love."

"Supper's 'most ready!" declared Mrs. Galloway, dashing for the stove and dropping the stove lifter on Mrs. Shapiro's large and capable foot.

"Madre de Dios!" exclaimed that lady. She lifted her foot in her hand and nursed it frankly.

"I'm sorry! I did n't mean to!" stammered Mrs. Galloway. "Seems like I got hoofs for hands when I try to hurry! Gracie, you better shut Herbert in the bathroom. I'll step on him if you don't!"

"Shall I set the table for you, Mrs. Galloway-dear?" asked Gracie after she had incarcerated the cat. "We ought to move the table close to Joe's chair."

The boy's sensitive face flushed.

"Tain't no use to—to do that!" he stammered. "I—I've got worse lately. I can't use my hands no more. I—I drop things!"

He looked from one to the other anxiously.

The six ladies exchanged a knowing look, and Mrs. Connor said softly, "Mother o' Gawd! Ain't that awful!"

Miss Mattie closed her eyes a moment and prayed earnestly. Then she answered the boy.

"That won't last long, son-dear!"

"Son-dear!" whispered Mrs. Meyer, beaming on Miss Mattie and nodding at Mrs. Shapiro, whose reply was a flashing smile and an answering nod which set her golden earrings tinkling.

"Your hands are helpful, strong hands! In God's creation there is no pain, and you can hold your fork! Gracie, set a place for Joe at the table and let him have my solid silver fork for awhile! Guess you could manage to hold a real silver fork that came down to me from my grandmother, could n't you, Joe?"

The boy's face lighted up.

"When you talk, Miss Mattie, seems like I could do anything you say!" declared the boy.



Mrs. Meyer rocked excitedly, and Mrs. Shapiro's teeth flashed into view.

"Sure, she'd give th' courage of a bulldawg to a Welch rabbit!" said Maggie Connor. "Come over, Miss Mattie-dear, some day whin I'm in th' dumps an' pull me out wid yer cheerfulness! Sure, ye've sunshine in yer voice!"

"Da peep' buy-a da fruit when-a da sun shine!" declared Mrs. Shapiro. "To smile give-a da courage to live — to get well!"

"Miss Mattie carries her courage here!" declared Mrs. Galloway solemnly, laying her hand upon her stomach, but she meant her heart, and everybody politely accepted the mental amendment.

By the frank preparations the visitors could see that supper was imminent, so they rose to go, despite Miss Mattie's urgent invitation for them to remain.

Mrs. Shapiro and Mrs. Meyer deposited the fruit and cakes on the table.

"Oh, oh! How kind! How kind!" sang Gracie, hopping again when she saw them.

"I made some cheese—" began Mrs. Knobloch, eyeing the presents wistfully, but Miss Mattie cut her short.

"No, no, dear friends! You must n't spoil us with your kindness! But my Heavenly Father is good to give me such kind neighbors."

THE RESCUE OF JOE CAMPBELL 113

The women looked at her and at each other in embarrassment.

"She's touched!" whispered Mrs. Connor, as they filed out.

"She ain't been right since she come out of th' hospital," added her daughter.

Mrs. Shapiro shook her head in dissent, but said nothing. Mrs. Meyer and Mrs. Knobloch climbed the back stairs, talking volubly in German, and the words "der lieber Gott" occurred so frequently that their very repetition seemed to convey a benediction from their kindly souls upon Miss Mattie and her children.

Mrs. Galloway's opinion was so well known it needed no further explanation. She did not believe that Joe could possibly get well, but she proposed to see that he went to his grave with a full stomach and clean underwear. There her duty for her neighbor stopped.

She clattered more than usual as she dished up a lamb stew for Joe's first dinner, with dumplings so light they fairly flaked, but her kind eyes were very tender every time they rested on the prostrate lad.

Nevertheless she flirted her head aside in pretended disapproval when Miss Mattie tilted the chair so that Joe could sit up to the table. He did manage to hold his fork and guided its trembling journeys to his mouth with hopeful determination,

and when two or three bits of dumpling fell to the floor, no one talked more volubly of other things and pretended not to notice the accidents more assiduously than Mrs. Galloway.

Gracie let the cat out of the bathroom, and set a saucer of milk for him near the stove. Then she cleared the table and washed the dishes with deft hands and eager willingness. Her lovely face grew lovelier each day, and her voice was ever singing some verse she had learned, set to music of her own making.

Joe listened to her with delight.

"What's that she's singin'?" he asked Miss Mattie.

They all stopped talking in order to hear.

"It is very nice to think
The world is full of meat and drink,
With little children saying grace
In every Christian kind of place!"

sang the child.

"I know!" smiled Miss Mattie. "There was a lady used to come to see her in the hospital and brought her books. Gracie is great on reading, and she learns real fast. The tunes to her songs she makes up."

"My, ain't she smart!" exclaimed Joe. Nevertheless he yawned frankly.

"He's sleepy!" cried Gracie, who always

seemed to be watching him. "Joe, Miss Matticdear says we've got to make up your bedroom just the way they make up a sleeping-car berth. The sides are this screen, and your door is this curtain! So you'll have lots of air!"

"To-morrow I'm going to fix up a cot for you in the salesroom. I don't have many customers evenings. And even if I did, they'd never go near the place I'd make for you. You wait and see!"

"He'd ought to have a wheel-chair," said Mrs. Galloway. "One of them he could push himself."

"'T would be nice," assented Miss Mattie. "Well, we'll just let Divine Love know our needs. It knows a heap better than we do how things ought to come."

"What is Divine Love?" asked Joe.

"It's God; it's your Heavenly Father," said Miss Mattie, beamingly. She spoke as if referring to some dearly beloved earthly relation. "It's what brought me to you and you to us. It's all good, Joe — and all power."

"Can it make me well?" asked the boy eagerly.

"It certainly can!" said Miss Mattie fervently.

"Ahem!" coughed Mrs. Galloway in warning. She waved first her hands and then her apron at Miss Mattie, in an endeavor to attract her attention so that Joe would not see. But the lad's face

was all eagerness, and his questions poured forth in a stream so that Miss Mattie did not see her signals.

"How does it work, Miss Mattie? What is it, anyhow?" asked the boy.

"You see, Joe, dear, the trouble with us is that we don't know what Divine Love is, nor what it has already done for us. Now just s'pose, for the fun of it, that you were that Power that we call God, and that you and Gracie found a couple of ant hills in the park. S'pose you wanted to feed the little fellers, and —"

A loud crash drowned her voice. Mrs. Galloway dropped the tea-kettle and the startled cat, who was calmly eating his supper, galloped madly across the floor and up the screen door, where he clung trembling until Miss Mattie plucked him off and soothed his fright.

"It is n't anything, kittie, but your Auntie Galloway clearing up!" soothed Miss Mattie.

"Looky here!" snapped Mrs. Galloway, whirling with surprising rapidity. "Don't you go and make me out the aunt to no cat! 'Cause I ain't!"

Again she attempted to flag Miss Mattie with a dust cloth, as if Miss Mattie were a freight train or a switch engine. But Miss Mattie, still carrying the cat, seated herself and went on.

"And s'pose," Miss Mattie continued calmly, "that the ants mistook your good intentions for

murder, and hid in the ground and stayed there, cold and sick, when all the time you were waiting with a plate of food for them to come out and help themselves. Would n't you think they were foolish to be so ignorant? Now that's just the way with God — Land of love, Mrs. Galloway, what are you making those hideous faces at yourself in the glass for? Have you got St. Vitus' dance?"

"No, I ain't!" declared Mrs. Galloway. "But I been tryin' for ten minutes to get your attention. When you git to talkin', I do b'lieve if I spilt the teakettle on you, you would n't move!"

"Well, I bet I would!" said Miss Mattie smiling. "I don't say I'd go as fast as the cat did, or to the same place, but I'd move. Now what do you want of me?"

Mrs. Galloway got behind Joe and screwed and twisted her mouth into truly terrible shapes. Miss Mattie watched her with growing anxiety.

"What are you trying to do, Mrs. Galloway?" asked Miss Mattie.

"I'm tryin' to tell you not to raise no false hopes in this boy's mind!" she wheezed. "It's all very well to talk spiritual impossibilities to Gracie. She's a girl, 'n' females are more used to disappointments in prayer than boys 'n' men. Just leave him be!"

"I won't either leave him be!" said Miss Mattie.



"Joe's got just as good a right to the use of his legs and arms as you have. If you had the say-so about him, would you condemn him to that Morris chair for life?"

"Certainly not!" cried Mrs. Galloway, indignant at the mere suggestion of such a thing.

"Well, do you claim to be any better or more merciful than God?"

"Why, Miss Mattie Morningglory," said Mrs. Galloway, "I do think you have the most blasphemious way of puttin' things I ever hearn tell of. And if I did n't think you was a pore afflicted critter I'd leave you to your own devices. As it is. I reely don't see how you're gonna make hats and sell 'em and raise this here orphan hospital and cook and wash for these childern without my help. So I'm goin' to stick to you till they're either well or you are struck by lightnin' for your false teachin's, 'n' I reely do not know which I expect the hardest! Now if you'll kindly put the clothes where I can get 'em early. I'll do your wash with mine. I ain't got a thing to do to-morrah, 'n' I can do up your clothes just as well as not. 'T ain't a bit o' trouble to wash. It just takes a little time. Good night, all!"

Gracie, seeing her about to depart, flew after her and flung her arms around her neck. Herbert jumped from Miss Mattie's lap and ran after Gracie. "Land sakes!" muttered Mrs. Galloway, as the child released her and danced back to her work. "That angel child ain't long for this world, Miss Mattie! Now you listen to my warnin'. I don't reely have no hopes at all that you'll raise her. If she ain't the sweetest thing!"

Mrs. Galloway wiped her eyes with her carefully folded pocket handkerchief, knocked a chair over, stepped on the cat, and left the room.

"God bless her!" smiled Miss Mattie, picking up the limping cat and the chair at the same time. "She's the angel, if ever there was one." She locked the door and came back. Then she and Gracie arranged Joe for the night.

"Good night, Joe, dear!" said Miss Mattie, when everything had been done.

She bent over and kissed the boy's thin cheek. And when she went to look at him an hour later she found him asleep, with his fingers still pressed to the cheek that she had kissed.

CHAPTER VIII

BOB AVERY DISCOVERS HIS ELDER BROTHER

RUMORS of how Miss Mattie had rescued Joe agitated the street all the evening. The newsboys who had seen the tall stranger release Bob from his imprisonment, and who had afterwards participated in the exciting run after the patrol wagon when it carted old Sproule to jail, were never so popular in their lives as when they could give Mrs. Shapiro and the Connors the details of Miss Mattie's heroism.

Steenie Knobloch joined the circle on his way home from work, and carried the news to his family.

The decision the street arrived at was that Miss Mattie was brave and plucky and not all there. They admired her; they pitied her; they despised her; they loved her. Theirs was a composite opinion, based on bewilderment, misunderstanding, a tardy admiration, and a reluctant approval.

But the street was rather proud of her, take it all in all, and the next morning the milliner's shop was the scene of great business activity, the women all coming to "try on" if not to buy. And to question without mercy.

BOB AVERY DISCOVERS HIS BROTHER 121

Miss Mattie patiently answered and tried to make her actions appear normal and rational, but her visitors persisted in bewildering her by their curiosity.

She loved companionship, and welcomed them with all her usual hospitality, but she was able to distinguish between the merely curious and those who came with the love of God in their hearts, glad to see the waifs of men's neglect gathered under the protecting wing of this childless mother, who seemed not to know that she was doing anything worthy of the slightest comment. She vaguely expected her neighbors to evince no sentiment, except possibly a certain amount of gratitude that she was able to rescue these helpless ones, but she was unprepared for gossip.

"You might 'a' got killed jist as well as not!" declared Mrs. Connor.

Miss Mattie smiled inscrutably.

"I was never in the least *mite* of danger!" she said. "I was protected in such a way that nothing could have got at me. That's why I was n't afraid."

"Yes," declared Mrs. Shapiro, "but you did-a not know de gentlemans would come!"

"Yes, I did!" said Miss Mattie incautiously.
"Ah, ha! You had it all planned!" derided Maggie Connor.

"No, I did n't; but I knew if I needed help, it would come!" said Miss Mattie looking worried.

"How did yez know it?" demanded Mrs. Connor.

"Because I've got a trust in my Heavenly Father that makes me know it!" cried Miss Mattie.

"Ah, yes, we all have that!" said Mrs. Meyer. "The dear God watches over all."

Miss Mattie turned away. She could not make them understand.

"Did yez hear how they caught old Sproule and jugged him?" asked Maggie Connor. "He looks just like a hidjus old bull frog, humpin' hisself along. And his ugly old voice sounds like one. Ye'll be wanted at his tri'l, I'm thinkin', Miss Mattie."

"I shan't appear against him," said Miss Mattie quickly. "I did n't see him do anything."

"Sure th' lad's all over bruises, Bob says!" cried Maggie Connor.

"In God's creation there is no pain," said Miss Mattie enigmatically.

"Ye're cracked, Miss Mattie," said Maggie frankly. "What become of the gentleman? That's romantic."

Mrs. Galloway rose quickly, tipping over her chair.

"If Miss Mattie Morningglory is cracked,

BOB AVERY DISCOVERS HIS BROTHER 123

Maggie Connor," she said, "it would be a good thing if several others on this here street, not a block from here, was cracked just like her. Miss Mattie don't know what become of the gentleman. She never runs after men as some people, not a great ways off, do, and what's more she don't keer what become of him."

"Nobody ast you to butt in!" said Maggie tartly.

"I did n't butt in," said Mrs. Galloway solemnly. "Buttin' ain't the way I start things. I just rise up and speak my mind."

"You sound like a locust, chirpin' such foolishness," said Maggie. "You get monot'nous to some people!"

"She's an angel, if ever there was one!" said Miss Mattie.

Mrs. Galloway's face evinced a mild indignation.

"I ain't no locust an' I ain't no angel, 'cause I happen to know they make that there noise with their hind legs, and I ain't got none."

Maggie burst out laughing. Her temper was short-lived.

"What you goin' to do with Joe, Miss Mattie?" she asked. "I b'lieve a good osteopath is what he needs. If you'll try it, I got a gentleman friend I kin get to give him treatments free. He'd do it just to please me!" she added with a giggle.

"I'm much obliged to you," said Miss Mattie, "but Joe don't need doctors."

"Don't need doctors!" cried several in a breath.
Miss Mattie shook her head.

"You ain't goin' to try anything fancy like 'lectricity or X-rays, are you?" asked Maggie.

"I'm going to try God!" said Miss Mattie suddenly.

Mrs. Shapiro jumped.

The Connors looked at each other, and Maggie touched her forehead when Miss Mattie was not looking.

There was a short silence, then Miss Mattie turned toward the group of ladies and smiled. It was such an innocent smile, so compassionate—indeed, her whole manner was so unworldly—that Mrs. Meyer frowned. The bridge of her nose ached with unshed tears and made her uncomfortable.

"I wish," said Miss Mattie sweetly, "I just wish I had the gift of language. Mrs. Meyer and Mrs. Shapiro have such lovely foreign languages to say all the beautiful things they think, but I can't put into words the thoughts I get out of my Bible nights when I'm alone with God, and He's instructing me how to cure my children. If I could, if I had the words, I could tell you things that would cause this whole place to be shaken, and we would all be filled with the Holy Ghost and speak with tongues."

BOB AVERY DISCOVERS HIS BROTHER 125

The Connors exchanged uneasy glances. Mrs. Shapiro's big, brilliant eyes softened, and she drew a step nearer to Miss Mattie.

"What you mean?" she asked, in her soft, deep voice.

"I mean that there is nothing the matter with Joe except just fear. That boy is n't a natural cripple. He was just scared to death of old Sproule. Sproule kept threatening to cut off his legs so Joe would be like him and could beg. And Joe believed him."

"I'd 'a' believed him, too, you bet your life," said Maggie, "if he'd ever done to me what he done to Joe. The old crocodile!"

"I tink-a he would kill-a dat Joe!" nodded Mrs. Shapiro.

"Well, anyway, he did n't!" said Miss Mattie.

"God sent the boys, and they saved him till I could get to him, and then that brave man came! I wish I knew who he was, so I could thank him. I was too flustered even to ask his name. I could at least have made his wife a hat."

"He knows where you live. He can find you!" suggested Maggie.

Miss Mattie shook her head.

"He went back to find Bob before I ever told the driver where to go. I'm afraid I'll never see him again. Still, he knows how happy he made us, and that's enough. I told him Joe would get well."

"How?" asked Mrs. Shapiro.

"It's in the Bible — all the promises. Jesus was kind. He never would have played a trick on us — healing in a way we could never imitate, and telling us to go ahead and do the same things, when He knew we could n't. No! He was honest with us. And if He was, why can't we do the 'greater works' that He told us to?"

"Is-a dat promees in your Bib'e?" asked Mrs. Shapiro.

Miss Mattie nodded.

"You make-a Joe well by your prayer?"

Miss Mattie nodded again.

Mrs. Shapiro was silent. She looked around at the assembled company. Then she looked at Miss Mattie.

"I b'leeve you will!" she said. "I not know why I say so, I feel it. Dat's all! You will see!" she added, shaking her long golden earrings at the others. "It is-a not for nossing dat Miss Mattie take-a her troub'e dis-a way!"

"Gracie can hear some — I got to admit that," said Maggie Connor. "Tain't all lip reading with her now. She's beginnin' to hear. I said so to Mamma the other day. Did n't I, Ma?"

The old lady nodded.

"And I agreed wit her," she said.

"I wish I had words," repeated Miss Mattie.

"I've heard them — big words that mean all-power and that God is everywhere, but I can't remember them. I heard a lady once, when I was in the hospital. She said God never sent sickness on anybody. He likes to see us well and happy, and if we understand this, we can be well and make others well. I'm going to try it on Joe!"

Such talk as this will rapidly empty a room of visitors who disagree with the sentiments expressed, and it was not long before Miss Mattie and Mrs. Galloway were alone.

The day passed quickly, for many changes had to be made with a boy in the family. Joe fitted easily into the home circle. Miss Mattie took him on faith, and even though she had taken him from such an environment she made no investigations and trusted him as completely as she trusted Gracie and Mrs. Galloway.

For several days Bob sent the papers by another boy and kept out of the way. Miss Mattie could not understand why, but she made no effort to find him.

One day he suddenly appeared, and for the first time Miss Mattie got a good look at him. His eyes, as Gracie had already noticed, were deep pools of eager observation and appraisement. In his quick, nervous glances were a clever detective's sureness and competence. One felt



Α.

the magnetism and latent power of the lad in spite of his shabbiness and grime.

"Where have you kept yourself?" asked Miss Mattie. "I've been looking for you ever since that day —"

"I don't want to talk about it!" said Bob quickly. "I came to-day to get it over with."

"Why?" asked Miss Mattie with astonishment.

"'Cause I'm ashamed!" roared the boy. "I meant to help! I wanted to get Joe for her," nodding at Gracie. "She wanted him, and I—" He stopped and choked with fury. "To think of that little half-man—that old Sproule—being strong enough to tie me up into a knot and drag me upstairs and put me out o' business! I could kill him!"

Joe in the Morris chair turned white and shook with fear. His eyes seemed starting from his head.

"He's strong!" he' whispered. "He can lift me with one hand. And then he laughs! Laughs!"

"Never you mind, Bob Avery!" said Miss Mattie. "You need n't be ashamed before us. Why, we are your *friends!* Gracie is just as much obliged to you as she can be, are n't you, little girl? And so am I. Now, don't you stay away from us any more. You just come and go as you please. What did they do with old Sproule?"

BOB AVERY DISCOVERS HIS BROTHER 129

"He's in jail!" declared the boy. He set his lips. "I hope they'll keep him there!"

"Whatever became of that gentleman? Did you find out his name?" asked Miss Mattie.

"Why, that's one of the things I came to ask you!" said the boy. "I've lost him."

"So've we!" said Miss Mattie in a disappointed tone. "But if it's right, he'll find us again, just as he came before. He rose right out of the sidewalk, the moment I needed him. And if either of us wants him again, he'll be there! You'll see! Our needs are all supplied before we know it."

"The sergeant that took old Sproule's name said he never was so glad to see a man! Said he'd had his eye on him for two years, just wishin' for a chance to nab him," declared Bob. "I guess he'll be kept safe enough. I wish they'd lock him up and forget him!"

Miss Mattie summoned Gracie and left the two boys together. She paid no further attention to the new lad, although Gracie's eyes wandered in his direction constantly, and Bob sat where he could watch the child at work. She was obediently helpful to Miss Mattie, who was hurrying to finish a hat which had to be delivered that afternoon. When Bob's short visit was over, Miss Mattie asked him to come again, and the lad's face glowed with pleasure.



He came often after that, and they grew to like him accordingly. The three children talked together. It did Joe good to keep in touch with his old life, and Bob sometimes dragged the Morris chair along the smooth sidewalk to the corner, where Joe could help tend the news stand. But Gracie was the one for whom all these kindly offices were performed. The child's beauty and sweetness seemed to draw the homeless lad and soften his rather hard nature as nothing else had power to do. Often Miss Mattie overheard snatches of their conversation. Gracie bravely bore witness to her simple faith, and the boys listened eagerly.

When Joe had been there about a month, the Knobloch family from the top floor came down one Sunday afternoon to see how they were getting on.

Steenie and Leila Knobloch were both exceedingly plain to look at, but kindly and generous upon closer acquaintance, and Miss Mattie shed upon them an approval which almost spoke aloud.

"Leila needs a new hat, Miss Mattie," said Steenie when they had been there half an hour and heard all there was to tell.

Miss Mattie laughed.

"Leila does n't need a new hat, any more than Gracie's cat needs two tails!" she said. "That's just your good and generous way of trying to help my work along. It's kind of you, but you wait. Generosity like yours does n't need to go begging. Your chance to let the bars down to some of God's lambs that can't keep up with the flock will come, just at the very time it's needed the worst."

Leila thought a moment, knowing that her husband had come down on purpose to find a way by which they could help. Miss Mattie did not know it, but to these two, children were very dear. The only child Leila had borne died, and they had seriously considered adopting a baby to take its place in their still aching hearts.

"Joe is so much better," said Leila finally, "I believe, if he had one of these here rolling chairs, he could deliver hats for you, Miss Mattie."

Joe's face went white.

"If I did," he stammered, "old Sproule would get me again!"

"He could n't!" said Steenie promptly. "He's safely jugged and his case won't come to trial this term of court. You're safe, lad. I don't believe any judge would turn such a varmint loose again; if he does, we'll see that he does n't get you!"

The boy's tense figure relaxed.

"I'd love to do something!" he said, with a sigh of fatigue at his helplessness.



"Well, you can!" said Leila. "You could go errands for me, and I'd pay you. I often want to send to the grocery for things in a hurry when I'm too busy to spare the time."

Steenie rose with a look of triumph on his lean brown face. His wife's cleverness always delighted him.

"You leave things to me!" he said. "I'm going to set Joe up in business! Say, what's the matter with his selling papers again? Everybody would buy from a boy in a wheeled chair!"

Joe's face was a study while these suggestions were being made, but at the last one his face fell.

"I could n't sell papers again. I've given this route to Bob."

"Who is Bob?" asked Steenie.

"Why, he's the boy that helped get Joe from Sproule — don't you remember?"

Gracie, who had been intently following the conversation, mostly by lip reading, broke in excitedly.

"He's the boy with such smartness in his eyes — the one that brings us our paper! He's going to be an editor!"

"That's the one," said Joe. "And now that I've given him the route, I could n't take it back again — that would n't be square!"

Miss Mattie beamed on Joe, but Steenie Knobloch, proofreader on a daily newspaper, bent a

BOB AVERY DISCOVERS HIS BROTHER 133

sharp, investigating look from his piercing eyes on the lad in the Morris chair. He felt a false note somewhere.

"Well, if he's going to be an editor, that will create a vacancy in the newspaper delivery business," he said, laughing. "He aims high, does n't he?" But a snap of his eyes showed that he liked Bob's spirit.

"He can do it!" declared Joe confidently. "He's a dandy."

"Tell him I'll read his editorials," said Steenie, as they rose to go. "And I'll be proud to say I knew the editor when he was only a newsboy!"

One day Bob came when both children were out. Miss Mattie looked at him in some surprise. Instead of his usual cheerful aspect, his whole appearance showed dejection and disappointment, but beneath both, a dogged determination. It seemed as if he were seizing an opportunity that he had long been waiting for to speak to Miss Mattie.

He was not a timid boy. Concerning surface matters he was almost nonchalant, but if anything lay close to his heart, he hesitated.

Seeing his suppressed excitement, Miss Mattie encouraged him. She was sitting by the window, weaving some pink straw into a bonnet for Gracie. The child did not need it, but the straw was a remnant from the summer trade and

Miss Mattie was making it solely to give her an extra pleasure.

"Well, Bob dear, what is it?" she asked, looking at him kindly.

"Oh, Miss Mattie!" he gulped. "Do you think you know me well enough to recommend me—give me a character?"

"Sure I do!" said Miss Mattie indistinctly, her mouth full of pins. She leaned forward, emptied the pins into her hand, ran her fingers through her riotous red-brown hair, and nodded her head. "Sure I do!" she repeated. "What do you want to be recommended for?"

"Well," said Bob, squeezing his ragged cap between his nervous brown fingers. "I'm going to apply for a job in the *Star* office. Summer's nearly over, and this is the time they take on new hands. I thought I'd learn to set type. I want to be a reporter next. But I want to begin at the bottom and learn everything there is to learn."

Miss Mattie looked at him. His eagerness and his earnest manner impressed her anew. He always interested her.

"You're pretty young, Bob," she said. "Are n't you aiming rather high for a kid?"

"Nope — not if I'm doped out to succeed. My father always said, 'Hitch your wagon to a star.' You can't aim much higher than that, can you?"

"No, you cannot," said Miss Mattie. She was so free from mad ambition herself, so beautifully content to tread life's common way, that she seemed to draw the archers to herself by sheer force of contrast. Gracie and Joe, she always felt, were destined to make their mark in the world. Now here was Bob.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" asked Miss Mattie.

"I want you to give me a character — a good name!"

Miss Mattie laid down the pink straw.

"I can't do either," she said. "But just wait a minute, Bob! Come back, here! My, but you are quick! Listen to me. I can't give you a character, because you've already got one; nor a good name, because you've already earned one. See! Now are n't you sorry I did n't let you get clear away, when you started on that Marathon of yours for the door, a minute ago?"

"Well, but Miss Mattie," interrupted the boy, "I've been chasing jobs for over a month. I've gone everywhere, but without a recommendation I can't get a good one — I can't seem to get any!" he finished with a gesture of despair.

"Oh, yes you can!" soothed Miss Mattie. "There's lots of places. But what you need is influence. Everybody's got to have influence, to get a job. Because you don't want just any



kind of a job — one you won't like, or that you'll get fired from, or that won't lead to anything better. What you want is — What's the matter? Feet hurt you?"

"No, no!" stammered the boy. "Only when you say things like that — just exactly what I'm after — it sort of goes to my feet and hands and I can't hold still. Go on, Miss Mattie? Please!"

Miss Mattie smiled, and showed all her white, even teeth.

"Well, what I was trying to say when you began that turkey-trot of yours was that there's lots of wrong places, and just one right place. The right place is one that will be pleasant to hold, and has promotion ahead of it, and room at the top. That's the one you want!"

Miss Mattie took up the pink straw again and looked out of the window. When the neighbors' wash was down, she could see down the area, clear to the street.

"Well," said Bob expectantly, "how am I going to find just that one place? Gee! It sounds good to hear you talk about it!"

"Did you ever try praying for it, and thanking God that He had fixed it and was holding it for you till you'd made up your slow human mind to go after it?"

The Mrs.-Galloway-look dawned in Bob's eyes.

Miss Mattie recognized it with a sigh. But some spiritual tendril in the boy's mind reached out and curled itself around Miss Mattie's surprising suggestion.

"I—I guess I don't know what you mean!" he stammered. Then, recognizing that she was mentally testing his fitness to receive her message, he added humbly, "Tell me, Miss Mattie!"

The grateful humility of his tone, so different from the cocksureness of the average boy, decided Miss Mattie. She laid down her work, folded her hands, and leaned forward.

"Bob," she said, "you've got a wonderful opportunity. I sort of feel that you're going to be somebody. You can do anything in the world, if you go at it right, and you can just as easy miss the right road at every turning if you go at it wrong. I know lots of boys and men that have got Success written all over them in gold letters, yet they are the biggest kind of failures, just because they used their own poor, miserable wisdom and left God out of their calculations. They'd laugh to hear me say so — me, a poor, homely old maid, without any success of my own — yet I know what I'm saying is true! Shall I go on, or do you think what few brains I used to own have gone?"

"Go on! I want to know what you call the right way!" answered the boy. And if there was

a little, laughing devil in the back of the city boy's brain, his grim determination to get a job at any cost silenced it for the time being at least. He possessed an open mind.

"Don't you know what you've got to work with, if you only knew how to lay hold of it?" asked Miss Mattie earnestly, and her earnestness swept the boy along with her eager speech. "You ask for my little bit of influence. Why, Bob, you've got God! And He is all-power! He's everywhere! He knows everything — just where this place of yours is. He knows that you belong to that place, and that it belongs to you. He is *Love*. Now then—use these things. Don't you know how to?"

"Not right off," said the boy, but his clever eyes snapped at the hint of power in Miss Mattie's words—that terrific power which the lad's ambitious spirit agonized to conquer and utilize.

"Well, listen!" said Miss Mattie. "You want a job, don't you? Now if your earthly father was alive and owned a big newspaper, it would n't take you long to go to him and say, 'Pa, I want to be like you. Give me a job. I'm willing to begin clear at the bottom, because I want to learn it all!" Now, would it? Stand still, can't you!"

Bob laughed, but understanding was beginning to dawn in his wonderful eyes, and Miss Mattie went on.

BOB AVERY DISCOVERS HIS BROTHER 139

"Well, you've got a much bigger chance with your Heavenly Father, 'cause He don't make mistakes. All the influence He's got is for you to use. Reach out with both your hands and fill 'em full of God's influence. Use that. Then, too, God's being your Heavenly Father makes Jesus your Elder Brother. He says, 'In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you'—"

"Gee, Miss Mattie! Does it say that in the Bible?" demanded Bob, his eyes sternly demanding truth from her.

"It certainly does!" answered Miss Mattie. "Just those very words. Here, I'll show you! Look! Now, just take hold of your Elder Brother's hand and ask Him to guide you straight to the place He's already been and got ready for you. Then see to it that you keep holding His hand and don't duck up an alley on the way there! These promises are only made to those that hear and understand and obey! Just you remember that!"

Bob Avery dropped his proud, unbelieving young head on his chest and struggled with himself for a moment. Then that which was to make him truly great, conquered. He looked down at his hands, then dashed for the door.

"Here, wait a minute! Come back!" cried Miss Mattie. But the boy did not even reply.



Miss Mattie closed her eyes and leaned her tired head against the chair for a few minutes. Then, with a cheerful smile, she sat up and began to work again.

In half an hour the door opened and a new Bob Avery appeared. Face and hands were immaculately clean; his hair, smoothly brushed, dripped water down on his shabby clothes. His face was shining with something beyond mere physical cleanliness.

"Miss Mattie," he said, "I get you! I'm going to use my influence. And I've got clean hands, 'cause I could n't offer my Elder Brother such hands as I came in here with! Now I'm ready! I'll come in and tell you about it, when I've cinched that job!"

He dashed away without another word, leaving Miss Mattie with her mouth open. Then she resolutely closed it.

"As a little child'!" she murmured. "A nice sort of shepherd I am! Always struck dumb whenever I get what I've prayed for. I wish I had more understanding! I wish I was more like these dear lambs of His. Well, I must go and get supper. The children will be in soon! Heavenly Father, ain't I lucky to be able to say those words—'The children will be in soon'!"



CHAPTER IX

THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE

WHILE Miss Mattie was getting supper, it occurred to her that she had not seen Mrs. Galloway all day.

Now for Mrs. Galloway to remain upstairs for more than three hours at a time, without managing some excuse to call on Miss Mattie to see what they were needing that her kindly hands could supply, was an unusual occurrence, so that for her to abstain all day — Miss Mattie's conscience smote her. Not so would Mrs. Galloway have neglected her!

Hastily giving a stir to the porridge and adding fresh water to the double boiler, Miss Mattie carefully wrote on Gracie's slate, "I have gone to see Mrs. Galloway," and then hurried up the single flight of stairs which separated them.

Just as she was about to knock, she heard voices.

"She's got comp'ny!" she said to herself. "Guess I won't go in."

Miss Mattie turned, and was about to descend the stairs, when something told her that Mrs. Galloway needed her. She was accustomed to listen for the still, small voice of guidance and to

follow it, for her simple soul believed with all its strength that her kind of a God really meant what He said when He promised "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left." So this time, when she heard the whisper, she turned, and it led her in at Mrs. Galloway's door.

"Land sakes!" cried Mrs. Galloway when she saw her visitor. "Come right in! What's the matter? Ain't either of the children met with an accident, is they?" Her tone betrayed acute anxiety.

"No, indeed," smiled Miss Mattie. "And they won't either, unless you can keep on expecting and predicting one faster than I can know there are no such things as accidents in the love of God. I can tell you, it keeps me working hard in hope and joy to get ahead of your croaking!"

"Come right in and set down!" said Mrs. Galloway. "And let me tell you I don't expect nothin' that ain't bound to happen. Did you know the Meyer children on the third floor got scarlet fever?"

"No, I did n't know it," declared Miss Mattie, "and I don't know it now, and I don't propose to know it. For if I did, Gracie and Joe could catch it. As it is, I made up my mind before I got either of them that they were n't going to have

any of those so-called child's diseases, and if I've got that same Mind in me which was also in Christ Jesus, I've got a sure promise from my Heavenly Father to lean back on."

"Miss Mattie Morningglory, you mean to teli me you have any idee o' raisin' them children without them havin' mumps 'n' measles 'n' whoopin' cough?" demanded Mrs. Galloway, belligerently. "'N' even if you did, d' you know what a risk you're runnin' of them ketchin' 'em after they are growed up 'n' then dyin' after all your trouble 'n' expense of raisin' 'n' educatin' 'em?"

"Oh," said Miss Mattie, "then it's your idea, is it, that if it is the will of their Heavenly Father to have them die, I'd better let them die while they are young and inexpensive, because it will be cheaper for me! Is that what you mean?"

Mrs. Galloway sank speechless into a rocking chair, which gave out an agonized creak under her bulk. The chairs of both ladies rocked violently.

"Miss Mattie," began Mrs. Galloway, and choked, "Miss Mattie, your blasphemiousness takes my breath away. It surely does. The wonder to me is that you ain't struck dead for it, by an angry God!"

"My God don't get angry!" said Miss Mattie cheerfully. "He learned to control His temper

soon after Moses and David and all those prophets quit making Him out to be the same kind of a God they would have been in His place. God does n't get mad, did n't you know that? You can see it for yourself if you search the Scriptures, instead of just galloping over a few verses Sundays to keep your conscience greased. God says of Himself that He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever! Yet, if you're going to believe all you read, just casual, you got to believe that by the time His son Jesus was born, He had changed and turned into a God of such love and tenderness and happiness that all we got to do is to make a joyful noise before Him. Now whose testimony are you going to believe — that of the patriarchs who never saw Him, or of His own son, who healed disease by means of His love and promised that we could?— What's the matter with your hand?"

"Ain't nothin' the matter with it," said Mrs. Galloway hastily. She thrust it behind her as she spoke.

"I'm glad to hear you deny it. But that looks to me mightily like a bandage. Did you put it on to look pretty?"

"You're awfully sarcastic, Miss Mattie," began Mrs. Galloway. "Ouch!" she added, as she struck her bandaged hand against the chair. Her face twisted with pain. "I don't reely mind tellin' you," she said, after a pause, "that I spilled a cup o' boilin' coffee on my hand as I went to give—"

She stopped suddenly, and a deep blush overspread her large, pendulous cheeks. She looked in a guilty manner toward the bed. Miss Mattie's glance followed Mrs. Galloway's, and there, among the high pillows, lay a small gray head, lighted by two intensely black, beady eyes, which looked like wicked shoe buttons. The eyes were snapping so fiercely that Miss Mattie gave a start.

"For goodness sake!" she whispered. "Who's that?"

"That — why that is my old aunt I was tellin' you about. I — she — I could n't git nobody to tend her, and she's pretty old to be left with strangers — she's 'most eighty, you know — she's 'way past seventy-nine, and the last time I seen her she sorta seemed lonesome, so I — I did n't want to take her —" here a vicious cackle came from the wrinkled brown face of the pickled walnut on the snowy bed —"but I got the idear that maybe, as I could n't find any lambs that could n't keep up with the flock, there might be a feeble ol' sheep —"

She got no farther, for Miss Mattie, laughing, yet with tears in her eyes, got up and threw her arms around Mrs. Galloway, crying, "You dear, blessed hypocrite! Pretending you don't believe



in the God of love, and then going and doing His commandments in a heap sweeter and more unselfish way than you're always praising me for doing, for you've got a disagreeable,"— Miss Mattie considerately whispered this part of her speech—"bad-tempered old lady to wait on, while I've got sweet, lovely, interesting children that anybody could love! You're a real Christian, Mrs. Galloway, in spite of your fierce idea of God!"

"Huh!" exclaimed Mrs. Galloway, gallant to the last. "Did you think you was the *only* Christian in this building, just because you cut loose from all the pious b'liefs you was raised with?"

Miss Mattie made no reply. She went over to the bed, stooped, and kissed the withered brown face, but the old lady struck at her with her frail little claw, then carefully wiped the kiss off with her pocket handkerchief, muttering angrily to herself. Mrs. Galloway and Miss Mattie exchanged amused glances as they walked toward the door.

"I'm sorry your hand seems burned," said Miss Mattie. Then she added diffidently, yet as if impelled to offer what she had, "I know you don't think much of my way of praying, but if you'll take off that lard-and-flour bandage and let God heal your hand, I'll be glad to help you!"

"Thank you just the same," said Mrs. Gallo-

way with stiff politeness, "but I've alwuz done my own prayin' with some fair amount o' success, 'n' I perpose to put prayers to the use they was intended, beseechin' God fur grace to do my unpleasant duty! Then I'll stick to lard 'n' flour for my burns!"

When Miss Mattie opened her own door she heard the cheerful voices of the children, and her face took on a look of rapturous joy.

"Oh, Miss Mattie! Miss Mattie!" shrieked Gracie. "Joe got out of his chair all by himself! God has healed him! God has healed him!"

"Land sakes! Tell me about it," cried Miss Mattie.

"Why, you know Bob dragged Joe's chair to the corner this afternoon, so he could tend the news stand while Bob went downtown—"

"Yes, I know!" said Miss Mattie eagerly.

"Well, I was jumping rope right near him, and I fell and bumped my head, and before I thought, I cried! I forgot the Heavenly Father's love, for a minute, Miss Mattie-dear! And Joe was so scared he forgot his legs and stood right up! I was so surprised I forgot to cry any more. I just hollered out, 'Oh, Joe-dear, you are healed!' And was n't it funny, Miss Mattie? Just the minute he remembered his legs they got paralyzed again! Why was that?"

"Well, he rose up in the strength of the Lord,"

said Miss Mattie, "but when he remembered how frail his own strength was, his soul fainted within him, and he sat down! But don't let's think of his sitting down—that is nothing! Let's remember that he stood up! That's how God's love works—and it's enough!"

Joe's depression over his returned weakness vanished under Miss Mattie's valiant words. He made an effort to stand up again when his simple supper of porridge and milk was put on the work-table, but Miss Mattie covered its futility by a funny description of how the old lady upstairs slapped her when she tried to smooth her pillow, and in the laughter this caused Joe forgot his trouble.

They were still at the table, trying to solve a puzzle Joe cut out of the evening paper for Gracie, when flying footsteps sounded in the salesroom and Bob Avery burst into the room like a young cyclone.

"I got it, Miss Mattie! And I found him! Just the job I was looking for! With a chance to go on! His name is Matt McCabe, and he was just as glad and astonished to see me as I was to see him! He asked after you—"

"Good land! Who was? Who did?" cried Miss Mattie.

"Matt McCabe! The man that helped us! The man that soaked old Sproule!"

"Land sakes! Did you find him?"

"Uh huh! I just walked bang into him. He's advertising manager of the Star! They set type in the advertising department — that's how I got to him, by saying I was willing to begin at the very bottom and learn it all! He gave me a job!"

Miss Mattie dropped into a chair, as if unable to stand. Bob, fairly dancing with excitement, caught his breath and rushed on.

"It came out just as you said! Just exactly! He wanted a boy! He had even thought of me, though he did n't know my name any more than I knew his! What do you think of that?"

"I don't know what to think! Guess I'm past thinking," smiled Miss Mattie.

"It's a dandy job,— in the same part of the building that Steenie Knobloch and Danny Swanger work in. And the pay is five dollars a week to begin with, and a raise if I make good! Hooray!"

And then, no longer able to restrain his joy, Bob turned a couple of cartwheels across the floor and bordered his performance by walking all around the room on his hands, with his feet in the air, to Joe's grinning and Gracie's claspedhand and round-eyed delight.

"Well, if that is n't the queerest way of thanking God I ever saw!" said Miss Mattie drolly.



"I'm glad it is n't a style all of us have to follow, because I don't believe I could do it in a tight skirt like this one!"

Bob fell over on the floor in a heap, and the children shouted with laughter.

"I bet I'm going to go nutty about that man!" said Bob. "He's just my kind—queer and different—sort of says one thing but means another just to see how you'll take it. Kind of cross on the outside,—which I like, 'specially if I know he does n't really mean it."

"I wish I could see him again," said Joe. "I liked the way he carried me — it did n't hurt my back a bit, but when old Sproule —"

"Don't let's talk about old Sproule," said Miss Mattie. "Maybe he tries awfully hard to be good, but his sorrow over being deformed just won't let him. I'm sure I'd slam things around some if I had to sit down the way he does and use my hands to walk with! It's awful to think what his life must be! No home, no wife, no children — just —"

A knock on the panel of the open door into the salesroom interrupted her. Thinking it was one of the neighbors, Miss Mattie called out "Come in!" when, to their surprise, in walked Mr. Matt McCabe.

Miss Mattie looked at Bob, expecting him to speak up and possibly to introduce them, but

THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE

151

Bob, overwhelmed by the proximity of his chief, seemed unable to move or speak.

The man smiled. His mane of coal-black hair hung over his forehead, beneath which shone the deep-set, light gray eyes which Miss Mattie so well remembered.

"I see that our young friend is struck dumb," said Mr. McCabe whimsically, "which necessitates my telling you that my name is McCabe, and to remind you that we have met before, all of us, that is, except this little lady!"

At that Miss Mattie found her voice.

"That is my little daughter, Grace Rosebrook, Mr. McCabe," she said. "And we are all of us — Joe and Bob, too — awfully glad to see you. I never had the manners to thank you for what you did for us the other day. The neighborwomen say I came near being killed, and that you saved my life —"

"If you say another word," said Mr. McCabe solemnly, "if you even finish your sentence, I will go home and we shall both miss knowing each other. The main reason I don't save more lives is because I hate to be thanked for it. So I mostly just let my friends die, whenever they want to!"

Miss Mattie stared at him. Then she laughed, slowly and as if almost afraid to. But gradually she recovered herself.



"What am I thinking of to let you stand up all this time?" she cried. "Take a seat, Mr. McCabe! Bob, draw up and have some supper. Gracie saved some hot porridge for you, because you said you'd come back and tell us about getting your job. It was such a cool evening, I made old-fashioned porridge!"

"I'm not hungry!" said Bob hastily.

"Nonsense, young man!" said Mr. McCabe. "Sit up to the table and eat! I would eat carpet tacks if so beautiful a child would wait on me!"

Miss Mattie bridled so consciously that she noticed it herself.

"Well, there!" she said. "Seems as if I love these children so much that if they get a compliment I feel as if I must blush, I'm so tickled. Maybe if you have n't had your supper, Mr. McCabe, you would like some porridge? There's good fresh milk to eat with it, and brownbread sandwiches."

"May I, Miss Mattie?" The man's keen dark face lighted with pleasure. "I can tell you that white oilcloth and that pitcher of milk remind me of the farm I was born on. My wife tells me that nothing in the city will ever seem to me as fresh and sweet as my memories of the farm, and I think she is right. She generally is!"

"Sit right up!" said Miss Mattie hospitably.

THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE

153

She bustled about, and in a moment Mr. McCabe and Bob Avery were sitting side by side, eating simple porridge as if it were the greatest delicacy of the season.

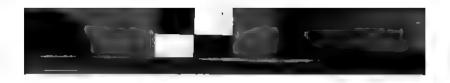
"As a rule," said Miss Mattie, "the children get just bowls of bread and milk for their supper, and their solid meal is in the middle of the day,—unless a neighbor-woman, who just spoils them, comes in and cooks them something fancy! But to-day being so cool, I thought porridge would taste kind of good. Is there enough salt in it to suit you, Mr. McCabe?"

Miss Mattie had a singularly musical voice, and as she fluttered around, adding this and that to the table, Matthew McCabe closed his eyes for a moment and listened. Then opened them and looked at her.

"It is, without doubt, the best porridge I ever tasted," he said firmly. "The salt, exactly the right amount, has been cooked in! I would not insult your cooking, madam, by adding seasoning of any sort."

"Land sakes!" cried Miss Mattie. But she was highly pleased, because she was not a natural cook as was Mrs. Galloway. "I made that blackberry jam, too!" she said, innocently fishing for another compliment.

"I used to pick blackberries for my mother to make just such jam," said Mr. McCabe, "and if



I say that yours is as good as hers, will you understand that I could not say more if I would?"

"Surely I will!" said Miss Mattie. "Now tell us about old Sproule. My, when I think of him!"

"He is safe in jail, and liable to stay there all winter. The calendar is crowded, and his case can't be called for months. That leaves us all easy in our minds, does n't it, Joe?"

The boy nodded.

"I'm sorry it had to happen," said Miss Mattie.
"I hate to think of any human being shut up in a jail or asylum, but sometimes it seems as if there is n't any other way."

"There certainly is no other way in this case," said Mr. McCabe. "I shall keep my eye on Sproule, and appear against him so that he will get his deserts and be kept where he can do no more harm—threatening and injuring children and scaring them half to death! Infamous!"

"Joe's going to get well, now that he's out of his reach," said Miss Mattie, and Mr. McCabe, thinking this encouragement merely imaginary, heartily agreed with her.

"Now," said Miss Mattie, settling herself, and with her eyes snapping with eagerness, "tell us about Bob! Of course you'll keep him, because he was sent to you. He has n't had time to tell us a thing."

"I can well believe that he was indeed sent

to us," said Mr. McCabe, "for to-day Danny Swanger was promoted to foreman, and his assistant put in charge of his linotype machine. I am advertising manager, and I needed a boy. The boss wanted me to take one of the boys out of the composing room, but I had looked them all over and it would not have paid me to train one of them. They had no brains to train, no ambition to rise. All they wanted was enough money to dress well and go to the picture shows with their girls. They always worked with their eyes on the clock. I said these things to the city editor and he, being in an unusually cross and disagreeable temper, told me that I would advertise for a month before I would get such a boy as I wanted — ambitious, industrious, open minded, willing to learn, and — honest!"

Mr. McCabe paused. Around the table four intelligent faces beamed with an eager happiness, not unmixed with awe. He saw that they looked at each other in an understanding of which he was ignorant.

"Is n't it wonderful!" said Miss Mattie, in a whisper. The children nodded, but they took it more tranquilly than she.

"Why is it so wonderful?" inquired Mr. McCabe.

Miss Mattie was so absorbed in accepting and assimilating this marvelous answer to her



prayers that she did not notice Bob Avery's mute, agonized appeal.

"Why," she said, rumpling her hair, "we've been praying for Bob to get exactly the right place — there's only one right place for each one of us, but ninety million wrong ones. So we rejoiced before he even started out, that his Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, had gone before him, straight to your office, and applied for the job for Bob, and got you to hold it for him!"

Matt McCabe, advertising manager of the New York Star, doubted the hitherto excellent hearing of his ears. He set down his glass.

"I - I beg your pardon?" he said.

Bob blushed a mortified crimson.

Miss Mattie, recalled to herself by the tense silence, looked around her and, realizing how her words must have sounded, sighed deeply.

"Nothing! Never mind!" she said. "I made a mistake to try to explain. I see I've shamed Bob. He looks so worried, I—I hope you won't lay it up against him that he's got such a friend as me!"

Miss Mattie's voice broke on the last words. She rose from the table and turned away. Matt McCabe, with a thousand burning words trembling for utterance, forced himself to sit still and remain silent, watching to see what Bob Avery would do.

THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE

He had not long to wait. After a slight pause, in which the boy's struggle with himself could be seen in his sensitive face, he rose and took Miss Mattie's hand.

"I don't care whether I lose the job or not, Miss Mattie!" he said bravely. "I am not going back on what you did for me this afternoon—no! And I'm not going back on my Heavenly Father and my Elder Brother! I don't believe I would have got that job if I had not held His hand all the way, just as you told me to!"

Miss Mattie, who knew boys, could hardly believe her ears. Her face beamed with pride and joy. But she said nothing, for glancing at Mr. McCabe, she saw that a change had come over his countenance. He cleared his throat and looked searchingly at the children.

"Bob," he said, "my wife believes things like that. She's often tried to make me, but I could n't. I think it takes a hero to testify to the truth of what he believes before a scoffer like me, so, if you don't mind, I'll start your salary at seven dollars a week, instead of five!" As he finished speaking Mr. McCabe turned his head away, but out of the corner of his eye he saw Gracie dance up and down in her chair and clap her hands.

"Are you so pleased, little lady?" he said. But as he was not facing her she made no reply.



"You'll have to look right at her when you talk," explained Miss Mattie, "so she can read your lips. The belief about her is that she can't hear — that she's deaf."

"Deaf!" cried Matt McCabe. "That exquisite child?"

"Is n't she!" exclaimed Miss Mattie, carefully turning her face away from Gracie. "Is n't she the most beautiful angel you ever saw? And so good! Why, Mr. McCabe, it's a privilege just to live in the same world with her."

"But deaf!" murmured the man. "Horrible!"
"Not horrible at all," said Miss Mattie, bridling. "She's liable to get her full hearing any moment of the day or night. And to make up for not having it now, she's got spiritual ears that can hear the still, small voice, and interpret thoughts. You never saw anything like the way she can hear what we are thinking."

"Was she born deaf?" asked Mr. McCabe.

Miss Mattie shook her head.

"Her father struck her and it caused abscesses which perforated the eardrums!"

The man uttered an exclamation of horror. Then he sighed.

"Hopeless!" he said. "That beautiful child!"

"Hopeless?" repeated Miss Mattie. "Is anything hopeless to God?"

Mr. McCabe drummed with his fingers on the

white oilcloth of the table, and his keen eyes searched Miss Mattie's face.

"I know," he said shortly, "that there are people who really believe such things. Yes, they—really—believe—them! It is incredible to me. I cannot fathom such innocent credulity!"

"Yet your own wife believes them," said Miss Mattie gently. "You surely respect her religion, even if you can't follow it yourself."

Mr. McCabe dropped his head so that his eyes were hidden.

"Yes," he said. "I respect everything about my wife. I would not have her or her beliefs changed in any way. Mine is the fault for not being able to follow her gentle leading. It is because of that — failing of mine that I am only advertising manager at forty-three, when, if I had been able, as Bob here, to take my — what is it?—my Elder Brother's hand, I might have been led up to heights where I could have written mighty books to stir a world!"

"Oh," cried Miss Mattie, with clasped hands, "if ever there was a man with Success marked all over his face, it's you, Mr. McCabe! Don't tell me that you are one of those who depend on nothing but their own poor, human will, and have missed the way! But even if you are, it is n't too late now to cast your net on the right side and draw it up—full! Have you been one



of those who have toiled all night in the darkness, and caught nothing?"

If any one had told Matthew McCabe at five o'clock that afternoon that inside of two hours he would be sitting in the company of children talking about God, and having his cool, scoffing, worldly heart actually touched to the feeling point by a middle-class, middle-aged milliner, who slurred the King's English, but whose voice, by reason of its sweetness, overcame his criticism, and whose sincerity and unworldly self-abnegation aroused his sincere and honest respect, he would have announced in no uncertain terms that his informant belonged to the numerous company of the half-witted, and cordially invited him to be on his way.

Yet there she sat opposite him, her big, redbrown eyes aflame with holy enthusiasm. Her pale face was crowned by splendid, riotous auburn hair, which might have been beautiful if it had been carefully arranged. But Miss Mattie had an excited way of torturing her hair while she talked, and Matt McCabe found himself not only condoning the habit but relishing, in a way, a woman so free from vanity. And he rejoiced that his somewhat meager acquaintance among the worthy had been enriched by the finding of her.

He thought it amazing, in the very heart of

this cold and cruel city, to find a stranger, or rather a friend, whose acquaintance was still less than an hour old, really caring what he believed — one who would clasp her hands in her earnestness and look him straight in the eye and arraign his unbelief, then urge noble facts and mighty truths, plucked from an unquestionable source, upon his blighted and withered spiritual understanding. The sweet unusualness of it touched him. He found himself yearning to respond, and disappointed that his miserable unbelief rose up and mocked him from within. Yet his honesty would not allow him to deceive her.

"I see," he said, "that you believe with all your heart what you are saying. I know that many worthy people join you in these beliefs. They pray, and think their prayers get answers —"

"We know they do," said Miss Mattie, softly.

"Yet sickness is on the increase—" pursued Mr. McCabe.

"The right kind of prayer heals sickness!" said Miss Mattie.

"Do you know the right kind? Can you heal?" asked the man.

"You could if you sought the Lord with all your heart and leaned not to your own understanding!"

"Me!" exclaimed Matt McCabe.

Miss Mattie nodded.



"You will, some day," she declared. "You've got it in your eyes and written all over your face. Success! And real success comes from God!"

"Why, I don't even believe in God!" exclaimed the man. "Of course my reason tells me that something is responsible for the universe, but at best I only call it the Great First Cause!"

"It's the same thing—we believe exactly alike, you and I," said Miss Mattie comfortably. "Only, at best, we call it 'Our Father which art in Heaven'!"

Under ordinary circumstances Matt McCabe would have continued arguing, but something in the hush which followed Miss Mattie's words struck through the armor of the man's atheistic thought. He glanced around, and saw three eager childish faces upturned to his, each aflame with the same beliefs Miss Mattie expressed and all breathing the innocent hope that he, too, would be convinced and join them.

He was touched, in spite of himself. Why? he asked himself on the way home. And the only answer the lonely man deduced was because they cared!

CHAPTER X

THE ADVENT OF GLORIA

MISS MATTIE, for the first time in ten years, was worried about money. It was October, and she owed a little over a hundred dollars to her various creditors. Try as she would, she had been able to scrape together but fifty, which she had safely locked in her desk the night before. But to owe fifty dollars which she could not raise was for Miss Mattie as great a calamity as for others to owe that many hundreds or thousands.

Summer was never very good for the millinery business, and this year, perhaps because Miss Mattie's expenses were heavier than usual, the hat trade seemed unusually light. Miss Mattie did not realize that her main interest in life was changing its basis and that styles in headgear no longer came first with her.

She was developing spiritually with great rapidity. The daily study of her Bible — striving to forget all she had ever learned of it and beginning over again to follow in the exact footprints of the great and gentle Way-shower — caused the withered life she had valued so lightly as to be almost willing to lay it down, to bud and blossom and finally to bear fruit.



Joe continued to improve. First, strength came to his hands and arms, then to his back. He began to sit up longer at a time. He tried to help with the housework. The day he stood on his feet, even for a second, taught him the ultimate healing he could surely expect.

After Steenie Knobloch got him a second-hand wheeled chair, Joe became more active in moving from place to place, but it was a question in Miss Mattie's mind whether the activity of the wheels did not take the place of the activity of the boy's body and thus retard his recovery.

Gracie taught him to wipe dishes, then to wash them, and he, in turn, taught her to play games to improve in her arithmetic, at which she was very poor and Joe excellent, as is natural to male animals.

Miss Mattie watched her children, and prayed daily, declaring the naturalness of good and refusing to recognize the permanence or reality of evil, and if she ever worried about money, or if her heart bled for the man who had so cruelly deceived her, no one saw it, for her composure before her little world was unshakable.

She often thought of poor Blanche, with her coming dread, her vicious temper, and her desperate life, for after her testimony as a witness at the trial she had, on account of her health, been paroled in the custody of her counsel.

THE ADVENT OF GLORIA

165

Mrs. Galloway and Miss Mattie often exchanged a whispered word about Blanche, but the subject was a painful one and was soon dropped.

On this morning, the second of October to be quite accurate, Mrs. Galloway got up very early, as was her custom, cooked her simple breakfast, cleared up, and then came downstairs carrying a plate, with its contents neatly divided — the clean scraps for Gracie's cat, Herbert, the other to be put in the great garbage can that stood in the area.

A moment later she threw herself against Miss Mattie's door, pounding and calling to her in an excitement not to be withstood. Miss Mattie rushed to the door and unlocked it.

"Land sakes!" whispered Mrs. Galloway. "Come out here quick! They's something alive in your ash can, and I'm too scairt to take the lid off. I can hear it moaning!"

"Shucks! It's prob'ly only a cat that's got shut in!" said Miss Mattie, somewhat exasperated at being unnecessarily alarmed.

"'T ain't neither," said Mrs. Galloway. "A cat would meow so's you could hear it to Harlem. This here's just able to move, whatever it is, and it's makin' the queerest sort of a squeakin' noise."

Miss Mattie, after a cautious glance at the empty area, stepped out and bent over the ash



can. Sure enough, she could hear a faint rustling, then a strange little wail, half human, half like a very young animal.

The two women looked at each other.

"Let's call the p'leece!" said Mrs. Galloway.

"No, I shan't," declared Miss Mattie valiantly. "I'm going to take the lid off. Go on in, if you're afraid."

"It may jump at you!" warned Mrs. Galloway. "You'd better cover your eyes. It might have claws!"

"You're enough to scare the life out of a person!" cried Miss Mattie. "You've got me thinking this might be a catamount now! A minute ago I was n't a mite scared. Listen!"

An unmistakable cry came from the interior of the can. Simultaneously, both women reached for the lid and snatched it off, for the cry they had heard was human.

A newspaper which rustled and moved met their eyes. Miss Mattie cautiously lifted one corner of it, then dropped it with a sick exclamation. Her face turned pale.

"It's a — oh, the awfullest —" she began.

Unable to bear the suspense any longer, Mrs. Galloway opened the paper wide, and there lay a very young infant, with sightless eyes, wide open, unblinking, blind—the most dreadful sight either woman had ever seen.

THE ADVENT OF GLORIA

167

The same thought struck them both, and for a moment they gazed at each other, speechless, each wondering how the other was going to bear up under it.

Then the pallor of Miss Mattie's face gave way to a burning flush. A look of heavenly determination came into her eyes.

She lifted the baby, paper and all.

"Go on in quick and light the stove and heat some milk. This child is so near dead right now that only Divine Love can bring it through."

"Now, Miss Mattie —" began Mrs. Galloway. Miss Mattie turned on her and her face was transfigured.

"My Heavenly Father has given this child into my hands, to do for it what its own father and mother would n't. They've left it to die, hoping it would die in my ash can! But God can make even the wrath of men to praise Him. This is my child—the one I did n't have—but I've got it now, thank God! I've got it now!"

"Sit down there, Mrs. Galloway," she said a moment later, "and hold her in this warm blanket. Now pray, as you never prayed before in your life, that this lamb's life may be spared, while I heat the milk. You don't seem to be able to hurry as I want you to!"

Mrs. Galloway accepted the charge reluctantly, for this time she honestly thought Miss Mattie's



wits had flown. Nevertheless she was obedient to the letter, and when Miss Mattie flew back with a cup of warm milk she found Mrs. Galloway gently swaying the bundle on her knee and repeating rapidly, "Now I lay me down to sleep — I pray the Lord my soul to keep — if I should die before I wake — I pray the Lord my soul to take — Amen — Now I lay me down to sleep — What are you laffin' at?"

"The child's going to live and be a blessing to me, or I could n't laugh, because I really feel more like crying," said Miss Mattie. "But when I heard the way you were praying—"

"Prayin'?" asked Mrs. Galloway, bewildered. "Was I?"

"Well, I don't know's you were, come to think of it. That's right! Hold her head a little mite higher! Sounded to me more like counting out for 'I spy.' Would you give her any more?"

"Not just now. I'd wrap her in cotton 'n' give her somethin' to clear her blood —"

"I'll wrap her in Divine Love, and we'll both of us, you and I, clear our minds of all evil concerning what we've been thinking of her father and mother. Then we'll just know she's a child of God, just the same as we are, and that will clear her blood! She'll grow up to be a handsome child, you see if she does n't!" declared Miss Mattie with breathless confidence.

"Miss Mattie-dear," said Mrs. Galloway, with unusual gentleness, on account of Miss Mattie's sensitiveness on the subject they were discussing, "I do' want you to go git fond of this child, just because we believe it to be his'n, 'n' then have it die, 'n' break your pore heart over again. So just make up your mind to let her go. She's bound to die — she can't live! And besides, she's stone blind — she ain't even got color where her eyes ought to be!"

For reply Miss Mattie snatched the bundle from Mrs. Galloway's arms. Her eyes shone; her breath came quickly.

"Now you listen to me, Mrs. Galloway," she cried, "while I make a prediction. You've made yours. I say that this child is going to grow up to be a well, handsome child, with perfect eyes and perfect sight! Wait a minute! I made a mistake—"

"I sh'd think you had!" retorted Mrs. Galloway indignantly.

"I admit it! I did!" cried Miss Mattie penitently. "I said she was going to grow up to be all those things. What I really ought to have said—"

"Is that you bow to the will of God, who in faithfulness hath afflicted us!" interrupted Mrs. Galloway with a triumphant smile on her face. "Now you make me proud o' you, Miss Mattie,



'cause I do see a little reel Christianity mixed up with the tares of your wheat." Mrs. Galloway, in moments of theological enthusiasm, was inclined to fling in an extra word or two, regardless of its exact meaning.

Miss Mattie stood, swinging the shapeless bundle containing the baby back and forth. It had stopped its feeble wailing with the comfort of the warm milk, and was still alive, for Miss Mattie could feel it move.

"The will of God concerning all His children." said Miss Mattie, "is that they should be well and happy. It does n't do Him any good to hear the sound of their wailing, and the Scripture pointedly declares that God will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and that sorrow and sighing shall flee away. This child has been given to me in answer to my earnest prayer that all lambs that could n't keep up with the flock should be sent straight to me. Of course," she added with a little excited laugh, "I didn't think any of them would come the area way and land in the ash can; still, God's ways are past finding out, and maybe that was His way of making me willing to stoop. You know He taught a big lesson once by means of a manger."

"Oh, Miss Mattie! Miss Mattie! Your blasphemiousness!" moaned Mrs. Galloway, wringing her hands. "To think of comparing the little baby Jesus with this here fatherless morsel of iniquity, and the sacred manger with a —"

"I did n't!" cried Miss Mattie. "And nothing is blasphemous except in the way it's meant, and taken. Now listen! This child's name is — is Gloria! She's baptized right now with the purity of pure thoughts concerning her parents. And she is already, in the sight of God, perfect, without a blemish on her anywhere! She can see just as well as any other. How old should you say she was, Mrs. Galloway? You've had more experience with babies than I have!"

"Hm!" pondered Mrs. Galloway. "If I could stand it to look at her again maybe I could tell. But honest, Miss Mattie, the sight of her goes right to my stummick."

"I don't want you to look at her with your human eyes," declared Miss Mattie. "Turn your spiritual vision on her and see how pink and white and sweet her flesh is! In her flesh shall you see God — just as Job did! He told those doubter friends of his that in his flesh, in the purifying of it from boils, should they see what God could do, if he just kept on thinking right. And he did! How — where you going, Mrs. Galloway?"

"I'm goin' to see if my old aunt don't need me," said Mrs. Galloway. "I can't stand no more!" Miss Mattie's shining dishpan hung on



a nail behind the door. As she passed it, Mrs. Galloway accidently knocked it off, and the clatter waked Gracie, who sat up, rubbing her eyes.

Miss Mattie stared at her in amazement.

"Did you hear that?" asked Miss Mattie.

"Of course I did, Miss Mattie-love!" said Gracie, smiling sleepily. "I've been hearing big noises like that ever since I saw Joe stand up on his paralyzed legs. God does as much for one of his children as he does for another. What have you got in your arms? The kittie?"

"No," said Miss Mattie. "I've got a little sister for you and Joe! Now don't squeal so! I know you are tickled — just as tickled as I am! Come on, and I'll let you hold her while I scramble into some clothes. Now, you must n't ask to see her right away, because —"

"I know!" said Gracie, wisely. "She's another little lamb that can't keep up with the flock, or she would n't have come to us! I won't look at her, Miss Mattie. I know she's perfect! I just want to hold her! Is she too little to squeeze, if I do it very gently?"

"My, yes!" said Miss Mattie. "You want to hold her just as if she was an egg that you were afraid you'd break!"

Miss Mattie laid the soft bundle in Gracie's arms, which received it with a love that in itself was healing.

"Oh—h—h! My arms are just crazy to shut up on her! What is her name, Miss Mattie-sweet?"

"I've named her Gloria," came in a muffled voice from the black skirt Miss Mattie was just drawing over her head, "because her advent into this family was glorious!"

She repeated her words, when she emerged, for Gracie's benefit.

"What a beautiful mind you have, Miss Mattie-dear, to think such beautiful thoughts!" said the child, with that quaint, grown-up earnestness one sometimes sees in children who are not like other children.

Miss Mattie blushed like a rose under the little girl's words.

"You are so pretty, when you are pink!" smiled Gracie. "Why don't you make yourself as pretty all the time as you are sometimes?"

Miss Mattie stared at her.

"Pretty? Me?" she said, looking around the room to see if Gracie could by any possibility be addressing some one who had slipped in unseen.

The child nodded her head vigorously.

"I'm going to do your hair the next time you wash it. I saw such a pretty way Maggie Connor did one of her wax ladies in her show window. Your hair is *much* prettier than the wax ladies'!"

Miss Mattie's face twisted with pain. Larry



had always admired her hair, but with the discovery of his perfidy Miss Mattie had resolutely unbelieved every pleasant thing his flattering tongue had spoken — not without a wrench which only her tear-wet pillow knew — yet so completely that it came with a shock of surprise that her child should find a similar word of praise wherewith to bless her loneliness.

She was recalled to herself by the anxious look on Gracie's face.

"Did — did that remind you of something sad?" faltered the child.

"Just for a minute!" declared Miss Mattie cheerfully. Living in one room daytimes with two sharp-eyed children had taught Miss Mattie an almost instantaneous self-control. "Thank you, dearie, for thinking of doing my hair. I certainly will let you try your hand."

She bustled about in the preparation of breakfast and then called Joe. He slept in the salesroom, behind a screen, and was visibly proud of the progress he had made in helping not only himself but others.

In the midst of the excited conversation of the two children about the new baby, Miss Mattie's mind would occasionally wander anxiously to the fact that to-day she must face that agonizing experience for a proud and sensitive woman—not being able to pay what she justly owed.

They were still at the table when a knock came at the rear door. Miss Mattie turned pale, and the hand that held her cup trembled. Nevertheless she rose with a demeanor she vainly strove to make natural for the sake of the children.

It was the landlord, who stood there, looking puzzled.

"For the first time in ten years, Miss Mattie, I did n't get a cheque from you in my morning's mail yesterday," he said, "and as I need all my collections to meet a note due to-morrow, I ventured to call to ask about it."

"Mr. Selig," said Miss Mattie, "for the first time in ten years I did n't send you one, but—" here the honest Miss Mattie, for some unknown reason, hesitated to give him the cash locked in her desk. Well she knew he did not need it. A thought struck her. Perhaps to-day she would sell enough to raise all she needed! She lifted her head valiantly.

"If you need it to-morrow, I'll have it ready for you!" she said.

The man hesitated.

"You could n't give it to me to-day, could you? I need it, honest I do, Miss Mattie!"

A look of indecision swept over Miss Mattie's face. She looked around at her desk, and the man at once saw that she had the money there. He pressed his advantage.



Urged beyond her power to resist, Miss Mattie went to her desk, unlocked it, and opened the drawer where she had placed the money the night before, but it was empty. Blindly she ran her fingers into every corner of it; the money was gone.

For just a moment her heart stood still. Then bravely she closed the desk and faced the landlord.

"I can't spare it to-day, Mr. Selig; you'll get it to-morrow," she said quietly. Then, as the man began to grumble, the usually peaceful woman leaned forward, with a white face and blazing eyes, crying out, "Does n't promptness for ten years buy twenty-four hours' time?"

If a bomb had exploded under their feet the children could not have looked more surprised. Gracie almost dropped the baby, but on Joe's face there was another look—one of wise appraisement. By that one look, Miss Mattie felt that Joe knew the money was gone. In a sick flash she remembered that he had seen her put it away. Gracie had not come in, and they two had been alone.

With a muttered apology the landlord left, and Miss Mattie was face to face with the first great problem of her children—one of the problems the neighbors had predicted from the first.

She wanted to be alone to work it out, but she forced herself to let the children do the dishes as usual.

Finally, however, she found errands for Gracie and sent Joe to tend the telephone which stood on a desk in the salesroom. When the door closed behind them, Miss Mattie bowed her head upon her hands and wept — wept over the temptation of one of her lambs. Then the right thought came to her, and she rose, declaring the government of God over all His children, and resolutely set herself to the care of the baby.

Miss Mattie was alone in the bathroom with her newest lamb for over an hour. When she came out, she looked like one who had walked with God, so serene and uplifted was her aspect.

No one, she declared, not even Mrs. Galloway, was to see her baby again until she was well. As nearly as Miss Mattie could judge, the child was about two months old. By clinging fast to the way she believed the Master healed, she gave thanks that God's work was already done and, as valiantly as she could, she laid hold of that understanding.

Concerning the lost money she said nothing, but she prayed literally without ceasing. More than one customer rallied her on her absentmindedness, and then, for the moment, Miss Mattie would return to the subject in hand.

All day, too, she attended to the wants of little Gloria, whose voice changed from a weak sound like that of a sick kitten to a sturdy, human



cry which drew Miss Mattie, with mother-haste, to feed or cuddle the wee mite, who was destined to work such changes in the lives of those about her.

Finally, having a few minutes when she was alone, Miss Mattie went to Joe's cot behind the screen, tore it to pieces, and searched it thoroughly, with no result. She was about to come away, when she noticed that the brown denim of the screen had been loosened in one place, near the bottom. She knelt down, thrust three of her long white fingers into the aperture and drew out a ten-dollar bill. Then she reached her entire hand in and found her fifty dollars intact, just as she had folded them.

She was still on her knees behind the screen when the door opened and Joe, in his wheeled chair, came in.

Without seeing her, he called out:

"Miss Mattie! Oh, Miss Mattie! I can stand! Come here and see me! Watch me do it!"

She noticed that he did not blanch even when she came from behind the screen. Either his excitement annihilated his sense of guilt, or else he was a hardened sinner, and this was not his first offense.

But even if this latter were true, Miss Mattie could not forbear to share his joy over his wonderful healing.

THE ADVENT OF GLORIA

170

"Let me see!" she said, with eager interest.

Proudly the boy raised himself by his hands until his knees stiffened under him; then, very staggeringly, he bore his whole weight upon his feet and stood, nearly upright, beside his chair.

"Thank God, Joe!" cried Miss Mattie.

"I have," said the boy simply. "I did it right away — the very minute I discovered it."

Miss Mattie eyed him narrowly, but could detect no hypocrisy in his voice or words. After a slight pause he went on, saying: "Bob's got a great scheme, Miss Mattie. He says Gracie can write and — and he thinks maybe I can, too. He says if we will compose a paper — a newspaper, you know, telling all the interesting things that happen to us and to the kids we know — that he will get it up and print it for us, and I can sell it and make money! Won't that be great?"

"Are you so anxious to make money, Joe?" asked Miss Mattie wistfully. The boy had seated himself in his wheeled chair and was rolling it from place to place, picking up paper and setting things to rights in his orderly way, which Miss Mattie so admired, being herself very untidy in her work.

"You just bet your life I am!" he declared. "First, I want to pay you back for all you have spent on me—two suits of clothes, and the books, and you had to buy that cot and screen extra—"



"Did you know some of the denim has come loose on the screen?" interrupted Miss Mattie.

"No, I did n't. Where is it? If it has only come untacked, I can fix it."

He propelled his chair to the screen and pulled it open.

"It's down near the bottom of the middle section," said Miss Mattie, going nearer in order to see the boy's face.

"Why, it looks as if somebody had torn it. This was n't here yesterday, I'm sure. Say, Miss Mattie, did you come in here in the night and turn this screen around?"

"No," said Miss Mattie. "Why?"

"Because I remember that the green side was next to the bed when I went to sleep, and this morning, when I waked up, the brown side was next to me and the green on the outside."

"Are you sure, Joe?" asked Miss Mattie, bewildered.

"Perfectly sure. I fix it that way when I want to remind myself of something I want to do. You know we always keep the green side out to match the room, so when I turn it at night I am always reminded of what I want to do, and I know I turned it last night. I remember it just as distinctly! I could n't have dreamed that I fixed it, without doing it, could I?"

"Joe," said Miss Mattie, "come here, dear!

I want to look into your eyes. Why are you telling me all this rigmarole?"

"What rigmarole, Miss Mattie?"

"About this screen being turned in the night. Who could have turned it?"

"Why, nobody could, I s'pose. But it does seem queer to think, I remember so plainly putting the brown side out last night and —"

"Oh, Joe! Do be careful! If you are not telling the truth, you are breaking my heart!" cried Miss Mattie.

The boy looked up at her, apparently astonished and puzzled by her words.

"But I am telling you the truth, Miss Mattie!"

The milliner hesitated. The boy's face and manner were honest, and she would fain believe him, but she had been deceived so often that she was becoming sensitive. She did not relish being considered either an easy mark or a fool.

"Joe," she said finally, "did you know I lost some money last night—that roll of bills you saw me put in my desk?"

"Oh, Miss Mattie!" cried Joe. "Not all that? Why, there must have been fifty or sixty dollars there! Was that why you did n't pay Mr. Selig your rent this morning? I could n't make out why you would n't, when I knew you had it! Oh, I am so sorry! Do you think it was stolen?"



"Well, even if it was, I've found it again!" said Miss Mattie quietly.

"Found it?" cried Joe. "Where?"

The boy's tone was so sincere and honest that again Miss Mattie hesitated. Then, to test him, she took the plunge.

"In that torn place in your screen!" she said slowly.

Joe's lips moved as he whisperingly repeated Miss Mattie's astonishing words. Then, as he saw the connection, his face turned white, he clenched both hands, and stood up, crying out:

"Oh, Miss Mattie! Miss Mattie! You don't think I stole it, do you? Do you think I would steal from you — the dearest, best friend I ever had?"

Without realizing it, the boy walked the half-dozen steps which separated him from Miss Mattie, and flung himself into her arms, in a burst of tears.

"No, Joe!" she cried, mingling her tears with his. "No, dear lad! I do not believe it. I know you did n't! But for a little while I was misled! Forgive me, son, for suspecting you! Oh. I am wicked!"

"You are not!" cried Joe, lifting his head from her shoulder and giving her a little shake that made her smile through her tears. "Anybody would 'a' suspected such evidence as that! And specially when you took me in off the streets, without knowin' if I was honest or not. I've often thought of that, Miss Mattie, when I've been too nervous to sleep. I—I've laid awake here, all alone in this big room, and just loved you, Miss Mattie!"

"Oh, Joe!" cried Miss Mattie. "Ain't I lucky to have you and Gracie! Both you children must have had good, honest mothers and fathers to have given you such dispositions—"

She broke off suddenly, a horror of her own words in her thought.

"I wonder what little Gloria will be?" she said, half to herself.

Joe heard her.

"Why, Miss Mattie, what are you thinkin' of?" he said. "When I got to worryin' about not knowin' who my parents were, what did you read to me, out o' the Bible? 'Call no man your father upon earth, for one is your Father, even in Heaven!' 'N' if that's so, ain't the baby got as good a chance as I have?"

"Oh, Joe," said Miss Mattie penitently, "I forgot. Yes, dear, all the inheritance the baby's got comes from her Heavenly Father. But we must hold that thought pretty strong in her case, so that human theories can't creep in. Joe, is n't it wonderful how we help each other, in our pilgrimage? It's true that the Kingdom of



Heaven is within you, for I'm just as happy as I can be from having this little talk with you, and all day I've been too miserable for words. Now, I'm going to get supper. Mrs. Galloway sent down some Irish stew, and I'm going to make hot biscuits to eat with the gravy!"

Miss Mattie slept peacefully that night, a happy smile on her lips. But in the big, dark salesroom the crippled lad from the streets wept the long night through, and beat his pillow, and met the gray dawn with staring eyes which would not close nor let him rest.

CHAPTER XI

THE FAIRY GODFATHER ARRIVES

DURING the rush hours, some two months later, Miss Mattie was clinging to a strap in the Sixth Avenue Elevated when a man who had been standing in front of her suddenly turned and greeted her, and she saw it was Matt McCabe.

Christmas shopping had begun, and the crowd was enormous. It was between five and six, and incoming and outgoing passengers jostled and pushed the two more roughly than usual. The man tried to protect Miss Mattie, who clung valiantly to her strap to avoid being swept off the train before her station was reached. He thought at first that she was looking unusually well and told her so, but suddenly she gave a cry, which she vainly tried to smother in her muff, and turned so white that involuntarily the man put out a steadying hand.

"Are you hurt?" he asked solicitously, attempting to shield her from the passengers who were trampling her in their efforts to reach the door.

She shook her head.

"I saw some one!" she gasped. "It upset me for just a minute. But it is n't anything!"

The gate clanged shut. The train started. So

many had got off at the last station that the two were not so crowded. They moved apart a little, and Miss Mattie gave a sigh of relief.

"I ought n't to be downtown at this hour," she said apologetically. "But I get so little time since the baby came—"

"Baby!" exclaimed Mr. McCabe. "Have you added a baby to your collection?"

"You speak as if I had a dime museum or a zoo!" she said reproachfully. "When will you quit thinking of us as a menagerie and raise us to — well, to the dignity of an asylum! Then at least we'd be human!"

"I have never thought of your goodness to those homeless waifs as human," said Mr. McCabe gently. "To me it has always seemed divine!"

"Land sakes!" cried Miss Mattie, blushing furiously. "I was joking! I was n't fishing for such flattery as that!"

"Why will you women wear shopping bags that fly open!" exclaimed Matt McCabe irritably. "Some day you'll lose something valuable."

"Mine does n't fly open," said Miss Mattie.

"It's open right now — wide open!" declared the man.

Miss Mattie looked down.

"It opens so hard — somebody in the crowd must have opened it and — yes! My purse is gone!"

"Was there much in it?" asked Mr. McCabe anxiously.

Miss Mattie did not answer. Instead, her eyes had a far-away, inscrutable look, as if she were delving into the past or divining the future. Mr. McCabe repeated his question.

"No," answered Miss Mattie. "There was hardly anything in it — no money, that is, but, if the person took it that I suspect —"

"The one you exclaimed about?" asked the man, his newspaper instinct scenting the clew.

Miss Mattie nodded.

"If it was the one I think, she'll find something in that purse that she'll wish she had n't seen."

Miss Mattie's deep breathing showed her agitation.

"And," she went on, "it gives me an idea I had n't thought of before — something I've been puzzling over for two months!"

Mr. McCabe said nothing, but Miss Mattie could see his interest in the darkening of his gray eyes.

"I wish I could tell you all about it, seeing that you're kind enough to look interested," she said with that childish ingenuousness the jaded newspaper man found so refreshing, "but I'm not sure enough to speak now, and besides, I don't believe I ever could tell anybody about it,

because it touches a spot in my heart so sore it all but kills me to think of, even when I'm alone and the lights are out. You know what I mean, don't you? You look as if you had known what it was to have a sick heart, for all you've got such a nice wife!"

"Yes! Yes! Miss Mattie!" said the man hastily. "You have laid your finger in that one speech on the sorest spot in it!"

"Did I? Well, I did n't mean to. Divine Love is healing my trouble, and it would heal yours if you'd only let it!"

To which Matt McCabe made the astounding reply: "I believe it is doing it in spite of me!"

A light, such as must shine from the eyes of saints, illumined the dark eyes of Miss Mattie as she lifted them to his, and said, "Thank God for that, then!"

"Here's your station," said Mr. McCabe. "I suppose it would be too much if I'd ask you to let me come home to supper with you, would n't it?"

Miss Mattie hesitated.

"We don't have much," she began.

"But I've never seen the baby!" exclaimed the man artfully, "and as for supper, there is a delicatessen on the corner, and I have a sickening amount of money with me—"

Miss Mattie laughed.

"Come on, then! The children will be delighted. But as to the baby, I must warn you. She's blind!"

"I am not in the least surprised," declared Mr. McCabe. "It would have been a nervous shock to me if she had n't something the matter with her! Has she the usual number of arms and legs? Is blindness the only difficulty?"

"Now you're making fun of me," said Miss Mattie gently. "Well, I suppose it does seem kind of ridiculous to a worldly man like you, to see a homely old maid mothering all the deaf, blind, and crippled children she can coax under her wing, but man, if you knew the lonesomeness of my life! If you knew how sick and empty my heart was till I happened to think of doing for others and forgetting my own selfish sorrow, you would n't laugh at me! I don't know why I'm telling you this — you a big newspaper man, happy and rich and never lonesome for human love, but somehow I just felt like it. As I say, I don't know why!"

"I do," said Mr. McCabe, quickly. "I know just why you are telling me. Because I need such words as those and such an example as you set in bearing trouble. I'm afraid I've let mine sour me."

"You ain't a mite sour," declared Miss Mattie.
"You've got kindness stamped all over your face.

The children took to you — that's a sure sign. Bob is just so near crazy about you he has n't good sense on any subject. He won't talk of anybody else but just you."

"That must bore you almost to distraction," suggested the man, dropping his bait into the water cautiously.

"Does n't bore us a bit!" declared Miss Mattie, swallowing the hook so innocently that the man would have blushed—if he could. But blushes die young in the newspaper world. "We think you are real interesting. And your work on the paper Bob says is just great!"

Matt McCabe threw back his head and laughed, but it was a laugh with no mirth in it.

"My work great!" he cried. "I am nothing but a poor, hard working advertising manager of a big city daily! Not one person who reads the gauziest story written by a cub reporter but takes more interest in his work than in mine, and in his personality than in my life history! What does the world care that in my own eyes I am a failure — a miserable half-man!"

"Why?" asked Miss Mattie breathlessly.

"Because I wanted to write! Not on newspapers! That work dies in an hour—though it is often a stepping stone. I wanted to write books—big, strong, tender, human books, but so simple as to be great! Books of people so

intimately done that all of you would say 'I know these people! I could have written that book!' When you can make your readers say that, then you have a book that the people love. More than that — they reach in behind the book and love you for writing it!"

"And do you care for human love as much as that?" whispered Miss Mattie, awed by the passion in the man's voice.

"Miss Mattie, no man who ever lived is as heart-hungry as I."

Miss Mattie quickened her pace.

"You must come and see the children often, then!" she said. "I used to feel that way, but I'm getting over it."

"Wait!" said Mr. McCabe, holding her back.
"Come in here and tell me what children can eat when their fairy godfather comes to town."

Miss Mattie looked in at the attractive show window.

"This is n't Vogelsang's! The delicatessen's in the next block. This is the Woman's Exchange, and things are more expensive here. Let's go to the other place. It's kept by Maggie Connor's beau, and I like him!"

"I think these women need encouraging to the extent of the children's supper," said Mr. McCabe, with that masculine decision which women not much accustomed to men find so attractive.

"Besides, things are home-cooked here, and I want my feast to be as wholesome and delicious to their taste as that they are accustomed to."

Miss Mattie looked suspiciously at him, to see if he were again making fun, but his eyes, as he looked down at her, while holding the heavy door open for her to enter, were so kindly, nay, almost wistful, that she felt a little uncomfortable and wondered, as usual, if there were not something that *she* could do to make his trouble a little lighter.

He marched straight to the glass counter containing the cooked things and asked for a basket.

A blue and white affair caught his eye.

"I'll take that, if you please," he said. Then, to Miss Mattie, he added in a lower tone, "It reminds me of Gracie, it is so dainty."

Miss Mattie squeezed her hands together inside her muff.

"Oh, Mr. McCabe!" she said. "You've got such beautiful ideas in your mind, I wish you would put them in a book! Would n't I just love to read a book that you had written!"

"A beautiful nature is worth far more than a few flowery ideas," answered the man.

"I know it," said Miss Mattie innocently, "and I am so thankful you've got both!"

He looked at her quickly, then glanced away, ashamed to suspect such honesty and sincerity.

He had never met any one in the least like Miss Mattie, and he was studying her as a new and interesting type — a thing she never even remotely suspected.

With quick decision he selected a dish of jellied chicken, some deviled eggs, a tray full of fruit tarts, and the only eight charlotte russes they had left. A glass jar of salted almonds and some ham sandwiches were ordered and deftly packed, almost before Miss Mattie could interfere.

"My land, Mr. McCabe! What are you up to! Do you think we are ostriches to eat so much? That will last us three days!"

"So much the better!" said Matt McCabe. "Just let me have that chocolate cake, will you? No, not that small apartment-house affair! I mean that noble, three-story-and-basement brownstone front! Now I think we are ready! Anything you were going to have, Miss Mattie, you can throw in for good measure!"

"Sakes alive, Mr. McCabe! What a generous provider you'd be for a large family!" Visions of the Meyer children on the third floor, just recovering from scarlet fever and needing delicacies they could not afford, danced through Miss Mattie's mind. "Have you any children, Mr. McCabe?" she asked.

"No," said the man hurriedly and a trifle sternly, "no; I have no children, Miss Mattie

Morningglory! I never had any of my own, and in my loneliness and grief I chose a more selfish way than you. I shut myself up within myself and brooded!"

"That was n't healthy," said Miss Mattie, with kindly anxiety visible in her voice, "but in your case it does n't seem to have harmed you any, you've come out of it so sweet and generous and considerate! But I suppose that's because you had years of beautiful living back of you. Trouble can't touch character to hurt it."

Mr. McCabe resolutely kept his face turned away. He could not believe her sincere, and he would not let her discover his unbelief, for fear she might prove her innocence to him and thus shame him anew. He realized, with a whimsical smile, that this threw the preponderance of evidence on Miss Mattie's side.

He paid the bill and swept the change into his hand without counting it,—a thing the good business woman at his side deprecated with a look. Then he held the door open for her and they passed out into the brilliantly lighted street. He looked at her with interest.

"What have you done to yourself, since I last saw you, to make you look so — different?" he asked, with all a man's helplessness in describing a woman's clothes.

Miss Mattie bridled visibly.

"Gracie made me!" she said. "She went to work and fixed my hair different, and then I found I could wear some of my most stylish hats, so she coaxed me to wear this one. It's too young for me, I know, but she — well, she said something flattering to me, so I just had to please her. I'm awfully soft, Mr. McCabe! 'Specially where those children are concerned."

"Yes, where any one you love is concerned, I can imagine that you would be—"

"Putty!" announced Miss Mattie cheerfully. "Just as soft as that. But so grateful for love — any old kind — that, give me a pat on the head and a few kind words, and I'll follow anybody off, just like a stray dog!"

"Don't speak of yourself in such a manner!" said Mr. McCabe almost sternly. "It degrades your beautiful dignity, and if you are grateful for love, then you are unique among women. Most of them use it as a lever to pry open the purse. You ought to be given a crown—a gold crown—and be made to sit on a gold throne. Grateful for love! Did a man ever hear such words from a woman! Why have you never married, Miss Mattie?"

The woman gasped.

"I had no right — no sort of right to ask that. It was unpardonable!"

"No, it was n't!" contradicted Miss Mattie, kindly. "You just sort of stumbled into asking it, because it naturally followed in your thoughts. I've done such things often, so I know. But — I can't answer that — yes, I will, too! I never married because nobody ever wanted me! fooled once by a man — he deceived me, and nearly broke my heart. I was foolish enough to be made sick by it, but you don't know how I cared for him — that is, I did n't care for him as I found him out to be,—but the ideal I had of him — the man I made him out to be, and just fell down before him and worshiped that's what I did! Oh, what I suffered in getting over it! You — do you know anything about it? The agony of finding out that your love — the best you could give — had been just wasted laughed at, maybe? Were you ever hurt like that?"

The woman at his side was trembling so that he drew her arm within his.

"Just like that!" he said hoarsely. "Every hour of anguish you describe I, too, have suffered. Just as you were hoodwinked and deceived, so was I also. And by the most beautiful of her sex. It made me hate women!"

"Oh, my being taken in never made me hate men," said Miss Mattie. "Because so many of them are splendid and fine and honorable, and make such good husbands. I just happened to be fooled by one of the few — the very few bad ones. It was n't hardly fair, because I had n't had any experience with men — nobody ever loved me before, or even pretended to, and I would have appreciated a chance to — well, just to wear myself out, you might say, loving a husband and fussing over him, making him comfortable and happy,—just as I fuss over the children. I told you I was soft, did n't I? Well, I guess I've proved it! But here we are!"

"Yes, Miss Mattie," said the man, clearing his

throat, "as you say, here we are!"

CHAPTER XII

MATT McCabe Becomes an Uncle by Brevet

IF MISS MATTIE had touched the case-hardened thing Matt McCabe for years had called his heart, she never suspected it. Inside of five minutes she was unpacking the blue and white basket, younger than the youngest of her children and far more excited than they. Bob Avery was there, much to Miss Mattie's delight, for he was almost as much one of her boys as Joe.

Gracie for once did not help with the supper. She sat entranced before the well-filled basket.

Mr. McCabe noticed it, and questioned her.

"It's the color! I never saw such a blue before, except in the sky, just before it storms!"

"Would you like to learn to paint?" asked the man.

The child shook her head.

"No, I want to put things on cloth. I want to embroider — small things first, Miss Mattie says. Then, when I grow up, dresses! I want to design and embroider — even paint dresses!"

"You shall do it!" exclaimed Mr. McCabe. "You let Miss Mattie tell me exactly what she wants you to have, and your Uncle Matt will get anything for you! Will you let him?"

But it was not the promise of the embroidery things which struck the child. She drew toward him, her big eyes looking intently into his.

"Do you really mean that?" she whispered.

"I really do!" He drew her to his knee. With a little happy sigh she threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she whispered, so softly that he had to bend to hear her. "I never had a truly uncle in my life. May I call you my Uncle Matt out loud — before people?"

He drew away and looked into her flower-like face.

"Is that what you thanked me for?" he asked, and his voice was so gruff the child thought he was angry.

She nodded, timidly.

Matt McCabe's mouth twisted in a curious smile.

"I must get two crowns and two gold thrones, I see!" he said. But his long arms closed around the child's little soft body in an embrace of sudden fervor, inexplicable even to himself.

He looked up to meet a curious look in the eyes of Bob Avery, and he remembered afterwards, wondering what it meant.

Never, in all their lives, had the children had such a feast. The table, usually rather scantily furnished, was covered with wonderful dishes,

the like of which they had never seen and the odors of which they had never smelled.

"All our noses are going like rabbits' to-night!" cried Gracie, "and — Uncle Matt, did you know that Bob can work his ears?"

"Land sakes! Who said you could call him uncle?" exclaimed Miss Mattie, with partly shocked and partly delighted smile.

"He did!" whispered Gracie.

"Do you object to the obvious relationship of big brother it makes me assume to yourself, madam?" asked Matt McCabe.

"Dear me, no!" answered Miss Mattie, involuntarily straightening under the dignified title. "Any woman would be proud to be your sister. Have you any real sisters, Mr. McCabe?"

"No, Miss Mattie, I am all alone in the world, except my mother, who still lives on the old farm. But she is in such feeble health I fear I shall not have even her very long. Then I shall be, indeed, desolate."

He saw the surprise in Miss Mattie's eyes and hastily added, "Except, of course, for my wife. You asked about sisters!"

"Of course," said Miss Mattie, but for some mysterious reason she felt uncomfortable. The thought flashed through her mind that possibly there was trouble between husband and wife. Still, there was the puzzling frankness with which he referred to her, and the admiration and respect evidenced by what he said.

But there was scant time for silent thought where the children were. Finally they began to lean back in their chairs, surfeited with food, but with faces beaming content.

"Honest, I never ate so much in my life!" sighed Miss Mattie.

"If I could just run around the table," said Joe, "and make more room inside! The cake ain't even cut yet!"

"There was once a boy who said, I can chaw, but I can't swaller'!" said Mr. McCabe, with that drollness, which no pen can describe, that some men can throw into their voices. The children watched his every move, listened to his every word, and greeted his every effort with flattering appreciation.

He and Miss Mattie exchanged amused glances.

"My hat always hurts me when I leave here!" he said.

"Why?" she asked innocently, her milliner's interest aroused.

"The children's applause swells my head so!" And his delight in having caught her was like the children's.

"Shucks!" said Miss Mattie, whose honest inelegancies had all the fascination of a new language to the fastidious man. Her conversation

was like a succession of slaps from a gentle surf — surprising in their first attack but so invigorating that he found himself seeking them and consciously enjoying them.

A baby's cry galvanized the relaxed company into instant life.

"You have n't seen Gloria yet, Uncle Matt!" cried Gracie, who seized every opportunity to use his new title. "Oh, she is so dear! May I go get her, Miss Mattie-sweet?"

"Why did n't you eat your jellied chicken?" asked Miss Mattie, seeing Gracie about to take her plate with her. "Do you want me to save it for you?"

"She was too full to eat it!" cried Joe.

It was Bob Avery who understood.

"She's going to give it to somebody! That's the kind of a girl Grace Rosebrook is!"

Matt McCabe listened with amused interest. Gracie was fond of all dainties, and he had selected the chicken more for Miss Mattie and the little girl than for the boys.

"I thought Mrs. Galloway's auntie would like it," said Gracie, answering Miss Mattie. "She has n't any teeth, and she told Mrs. Galloway she was so tired of 'slops' she was n't going to eat any more of them!"

"I saved—" began Miss Mattie, and paused. "All right, Gracie. Give it to me, and I'll set

it outside the window to keep hard till you can get time to take it up to her. That's right! Now, go get the baby!"

Matt McCabe looked quizzically at Miss Mattie.

"You took some out before you even set your own table!" he said. "And it was for your neighbors! You wonderful woman!"

Miss Mattie was spared the agony of a reply by the return of Gracie. In her arms she held a pink and white baby, apparently about five or six months old. Of her exact age they could never be sure. Her head was covered all over with hair of a color to arrest attention anywhere — soft, loose rings of ruddy gold, exquisite beyond description. Her face was round and her skin had upon it that ruddy bloom which one sometimes sees upon a delicately complexioned child who is overheated by play, even to the reddish circles under her eyes, but her eyes were closed, as if in sleep, and her golden eyelashes, of a slightly darker tint than her hair, rested upon her rose-leafed cheeks.

An exclamation of wonder rose to the man's lips, for the child was a vision of beauty, and had an expression so spiritual, so beyond and above that of any baby he had ever seen, that it affected him almost to tears. He cleared his throat in indignant amazement. He, Matt McCabe,

moved to an unmanly weakness by the sight of a baby's face? What was the matter with these people anyway, that they broke down human barriers by such ruthless mental means. He had been years in callousing his feelings and veneering his heart with any hard and protecting substance or incident which came to hand. How did they manage to find its fatal weakness and storm it so gently that he did not feel it, until after the mischief was done? His amazement grew.

"She is like a Guido Reni!" he said softly.

"Like a who?" asked Miss Mattie.

He did not answer.

"Where did you get her? Where did she come from?" he asked.

"I know, Uncle Matt!" said Gracie. "I found it in my book, and Miss Mattie says it exactly fits Gloria. Shall I say it?"

"Yes, do!" said the man. Miss Mattie took the baby.

Then the child, standing close beside her, repeated,

"'Where did you come from, baby dear?"

'Out of the everywhere into the here.'"

The baby seemed to listen intently to the soft voice of the child.

"Where did you get those eyes of blue?"
Gracie went on. She laid a delicate finger tip

on the closed lids of the baby, and for the first time in his life Mr. McCabe saw a blind baby smile. Then and there he knew that all his former belief in his case-hardened heart was pure fiction, for his eyes stung with unshed tears and a physical heartache took possession of him at the sweetness and unutterable pathos of the picture before him.

"'Out of the sky as I came through,'"
the child continued.

""What makes the light in them sparkle and spin?"

'Some of the starry spikes left in.'

'Where did you get that little tear?'

'I found it waiting when I got here!'

Only she did n't, Uncle Matt! She never cries. I just put that in because the poem says so. But it is n't true!" said Gracie, earnestly.

"I see!" said Mr. McCabe.

"Now watch her, Uncle Matt!

""What makes your forehead so smooth and high?"" questioned Gracie, lifting the soft rings of gold from the baby's white brow.

"'A soft hand stroked it, as I went by!"

'What makes your cheek like a warm, pink rose?'

'I saw something better than any one knows!""

"I can readily believe that!" interrupted Mr. McCabe. "I never before realized the truth of Wordsworth's lines as I do at this moment."

"What lines? Say them, Mr. McCabe."

"'Trailing clouds of glory do we come From God, who is our home.

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!""

"Oh," cried Miss Mattie, "is n't that wonderful! And does n't it describe this baby! You write that down for us, Mr. McCabe, and we'll learn it — all of us! It'll help heal Gloria. Now go on, Gracie!"

"'Whence that three-cornered smile of bliss?'

'Three angels gave me at once a kiss!'
Oh, you darling dear!" cried Gracie, throwing her arms around the baby, and smothering her with kisses. "I always have to do that, Uncle Matt, when she smiles!"

"I don't blame you," said Mr. McCabe. "You might throw in a few extra ones for me, while you are about it!"

Gracie did so, laughing gayly, and then continued:

"'Where did you get this pearly ear?"

'God spoke and it came out to hear!'

Oh, look at her! Look at her, Miss Mattie! She touched her own ear when I said that! She knows! She knows what I'm saying!"

"I believe she does," said Miss Mattie. "Don't you, Mr. McCabe? Gracie generally puts her finger on the baby's ear, but she did n't do it this time—"

"And Gloria reminded me!" cried Gracie. "Oh, is n't she smart?"

"It certainly did look that way," said Mr. McCabe, "although, as a rule, I am not a good judge of the intelligence of ladies as young as this one!"

Gracie listened rapturously and the children all gave an appreciative giggle, that the lonely man was involuntarily learning to listen for. The boys had stopped their talk of wireless, when Gracie began to recite, and Bob Avery had stolen closer and closer until now he was crouching on a chair beside the table, with both his eyes fixed on the child's graceful figure.

- "'Where did you get those arms and hands?"
- 'Love made itself into hooks and bands!'"
 Miss Mattie put the baby's arms around Gracie's neck, as these words were spoken.
 - "'Feet, whence did you come, you darling things?"
 - 'From the same box as the cherubs' wings!'
 - 'How did they all come to be just you?'
 - 'God thought about me, and so I grew!'
 - 'How did you come to us, you dear?'
 - 'God thought about you, and so I'm here!'"

As the child finished speaking, the baby gave a leap in Miss Mattie's arms and held out her hands to Gracie to be taken.

The room was quite still. It seemed as if all hearts there had been touched to the breaking point. The boys were ashamed to look at each other,— the man was dumb from sheer inability to express himself.

"That was lovely, Gracie!" he forced himself to say. Then to Miss Mattie he added, "Don't show me anything more! I can't bear it. I can't bear it!" And his voice was hoarse and unnatural.

"Come, Gracie!" said Miss Mattie, cheerfully. "Give baby to me. Now go get your jellied chicken and run up to Mrs. Galloway's. It's just her supper time. I smelled her coffee when I opened the window."

The child obediently ran, and the baby turned her head to listen to Gracie's flying footsteps. But the gold-fringed lids remained closed as if in placid sleep.

"I never, in all my life, saw such a beautiful baby," said Mr. McCabe. "Do tell me where you got her."

Bob Avery and Joe had their heads together, again talking wireless. Miss Mattie drew her chair a little nearer, seated the baby on her knee, and said:

"Somehow, I hate to tell you, Mr. McCabe. I never minded telling anybody before, but you seem so kind of particular — things go against you if they have a disgusting beginning, or are n't just right. Had n't you better take her just as you see her now?"

"No," said Mr. McCabe; "I am vitally interested in her. I have seen hundreds of babies, but

I never saw one like her. I used to sit in the park Sundays and watch little children, particularly babies, because I knew that I should never have any of my own, and - you may find it hard to believe, Miss Mattie, but at heart, I am a family man. I should love to have such a family as yours — sturdy, growing boys — a dainty little maid like Gracie. I should even enjoy the indignity of trundling a perambulator in the park of a Sunday morning — a thing I have always grinned at other men for doing! — if the child were like Gloria and — mine! Now have I sufficiently humbled myself? Do you demand any further degradation? Shall I lie down on the floor and invite the children to walk on me with hob-nailed boots? Shall I sit up and beg? Or bark, roll over, and play dead?"

"Sakes alive, Mr. McCabe!" cried Miss Mattie, scandalized. "Do you suppose I want you to do any of those things? I'm not fond of humiliating people — least of all one I respect as much as I do you! I'd just as soon tell you about Gloria — only, I was wondering if you could stand it."

"I think," said Mr. McCabe, "that I can stand anything!"

"Well," said Miss Mattie, "Mrs. Galloway and I found her wrapped in an old newspaper—"

"Found her wrapped in a newspaper!" exclaimed the man.

Miss Mattie nodded. Then she blurted out, anxious to get it over with, "In my ash can! With the lid on! She was nearly dead!"

An expression of the utmost horror broke from Mr. McCabe's lips, and Miss Mattie continued hurriedly:

"You think she is pretty now. Well, I would n't wish anybody to have seen her as Mrs. Galloway and I did that morning, because it was weeks before Mrs. Galloway could get the picture out of her mind. I'll only tell you that she had a skin trouble and her eyes were just like white marbles — no color in them, and wide open."

"Then, how—" began the man.

"Wait, Mr. McCabe. This is the part you'll find the hardest to swallow. Now grab hold of your chair, and hold on with both hands, for this is 'low-bridge' to your professed worldliness. But I've got to tell you! Nothing but prayer healed her. She never took any blood purifier nor had a thing rubbed on her skin. I even got her eyes shut by prayer, because I wanted people to see her, and I could n't stand hearing what they'd say. She used to hold her eyes open and flutter her lids till you'd get so nervous you could n't think. Then I prayed, and got her eyes shut. But I want to tell you something more wonderful. They are getting the color in them!

I know this. Some day she will open her eyes of her own accord, and they will be beautiful, and they will see!"

To explain the quick changes going on in Matt McCabe's mind would necessitate a description of a brain kaleidoscope. He experienced every revulsion of feeling which could come to the mind of an avowed scoffer at all religion—for his own use, at least,—yet crowding these unpleasant emotions was a sort of savage joy that something had been found by this simple-minded woman—found in her worn Bible, an unquestioned source,—by which to meet the knell sounded by doctors to so many anguished hearts—"There is no hope!"

In his mind's eye he could picture that morning on which the dreadful discovery of the waif had been made — of the sickening sight she must have been, even to stout-hearted Miss Mattie — of the love and courage combined which must have been operative to cause her to begin the great and holy work of healing the child by the means the Master used — and a verse from his far-off childhood attendance at Sunday school came vaguely to his mind. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." The words came with a shock.

Yet, if the Bible were true, here was an actual promise, to doubt which were to destroy the whole fabric of human faith in all that countless millions held dearer than mortal life.

And still — how preposterous to believe!

He had been sitting with his eyes closed. Suddenly he opened them.

"I know that all you say is true," he said slowly. "And yet will you hold me ungallant if I say that I wish I had seen the child in all her filth and wretchedness and disease! I am ashamed to utter the words, they seem so discourteous. But do you see where they lead? I actually want to believe! What a miracle!"

"I don't blame you a mite for wanting to see a healing," said Miss Mattie, laying the baby over her shoulder, where Gloria's head drooped in comfort. "I stuck right there for ever so long."

"Now how," said the man, "do you interpret the latter part of this verse—'and greater works than these shall ye do, because I go unto my Father!"

"Well," said Miss Mattie, "I'm not sure about my theology. I'm afraid I've not been properly instructed, but I've figured some of these problems out to explain to the children. Raising children is the most educating thing I ever did," said Miss Mattie solemnly. "The questions they can ask! Enough to drive a person raving distracted, and even then they'd want to know how it felt to be raving distracted! Well, as I was saying, I have something that satisfies me, and explains a heap more of other things that bothered me. Take that place where it calls Jesus our mediator, and again where it says 'the Spirit maketh intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered.' If God is Love, who does His son have to intercede with, and what for? You don't have to beseech Love to do good, do you? So I got this solution. If God is spirit, then He does n't know anything at all about this mortal existence of ours, except to know that something is going on in our poor foolish minds that is n't Just as we smile when we see a dog, lying comfortably in front of a fire, shiver and moan and twitch all over, dreaming that he's chasing a rabbit through the snow and ice. We know the dog is just imagining his excitement and disappointment, and that if we wake him up he'll be glad to realize the warmth and comfort he's really in. So that's how I figure out that statement in the Old Testament, 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil."

"You think, then, that your Heavenly Father not only does not send blindness of a baby, but does not know about it?" questioned the man. "Would n't that seem to limit God's intelligence?" "Well, the more anybody's intelligence is

limited about what is n't so, the better it is for them. I know a real nice woman — her name's Mrs. Waugh — who swears she's got the same right to a gizzard as a chicken, and she gets a pain in it quite often. Now if she believes she's got a pain in her gizzard, she thinks she's got more understanding of her insides than all the doctors. Yet I don't consider that my intelligence is limited because I know she has n't got a gizzard, and consequently can't have a pain in it!"

Matt McCabe threw back his head, and laughed as he had not laughed in years. Miss Mattie smiled sympathetically.

"I wish you could hear her talk about it!" she said. "She is n't crazy — she is n't even 'off' on any subject except that. She knows she's got a diseased gizzard, and the only way she could be cured — because she won't believe in prayer — would be to operate on her, and show her that her gizzard had been taken out. Then she'd get well!"

"I'll pay for the operation if you'll get her to have it done!" said Mr. McCabe, beginning to laugh again.

"Well," said Miss Mattie, "is that any stranger or more unnatural than for me to believe that Gloria's Heavenly Father made her blind? And against the belief in the minds of you and me and everybody that sees her, I believe that every day and every hour intercession is being made for her—that is, that our diseased beliefs about her may change—'with groanings that cannot be uttered.'"

Mr. McCabe did not speak, but his eyes questioned Miss Mattie further.

"To translate the needs of matter into spiritual language," she answered, "so God can understand what our bad dreams are about."

"Can the children understand such difficult theology as that?" asked Mr. McCabe incredulously.

"That's the funny part," declared Miss Mattie. "Such things are n't unbelievable to them. They swallow them whole. It's only educated minds that have to be emptied to make room for God's language. But, of course, I do sometimes have to make up a story to explain it to them. Then they get it right away. They like stories."

"Tell me one!" exclaimed the man. "I want to know how to believe that Gloria will receive her sight!"

"What is it you want to know, Mr. McCabe?" asked Miss Mattie.

"I want to know," said the man, almost irritably, "why it is that Christians who believe as you do — that is to say, those who take Christ's promises literally — are ever ill or poor or discouraged or afflicted in any way? Why can

you not lay hold of all of His promises at once and bring the millenium to yourselves, at least, immediately?"

Miss Mattie smiled.

"That's what Mrs. Galloway is always asking me," she said. "Well this is the reason. Suppose you came to see me in one of those fine apartments in Central Park West, where the rent is two or three hundred dollars a month, and found me lighting the drawing room with tallow candles. You would go over to the wall and show me how, by just pressing a button, I could flood the room with light, would n't you?

"Then suppose the next time you came, I'd say, 'Oh, Mr. McCabe, I'm so tickled with my new light that I've brought the gas range into the drawing room and we cook here!' You, having more understanding about light than I had, would say, 'But Miss Mattie, come into the kitchen and I'll show you that you can turn this same light on there!'

"Then the next time you came, suppose I'd say, 'Oh, Mr. McCabe, I'm so pleased with my new understanding of all the architect has done in providing comforts for me, even before he knew I was going to live here, that I've brought my bed out into the kitchen, so that I can use this same light longer."

"You would n't waste much time before you'd

explain to me that the light was in every room, just waiting to be turned on by any one with sense enough to use its power.

"Mr. McCabe, Jesus, the Christ, was the only One who ever used all the light all the time. He was 'the light of the world.' The rest of us grope in darkness until we learn that in every room there is light!"

The man's eager interest urging heron, Miss Mattie was about to continue, when agonized screams and hurried footsteps sounded on the stairs.

Before any one could move, the door burst open and Mrs. Galloway, half dragging, half carrying Gracie, staggered in.

Miss Mattie thrust the baby into Mr. McCabe's arms, much to that gentleman's astonishment, and reached out for Gracie.

"She — I scalt her with bilin' coffee!" stammered Mrs. Galloway, her sagging cheeks chalky white from fright and grief. "The lid fell off agin', 'n' she had her arm so clost — dear lamb! Don't cry so! See! I'll fix the burn with a plaster of lard 'n' flour —"

"Gracie!" came Miss Mattie's voice, gently.

The child ceased her sobbing and looked up.

"Did God send that burn?" asked Miss Mattie quietly.

The child shook her head.

"Then there is no necessity for it to hurt!"

declared Miss Mattie. "Come here and sit in my lap, while I whisper to you!"

"Kin I or kin I not make that there lard 'n' flour plaster?" demanded Mrs. Galloway, indignantly.

"You can not!" said Miss Mattie firmly. "Your own hand is still sore from a burn you got six weeks ago. Now you can see how quickly you could have healed it, if you'd used prayer! Gracie, look at me. Now listen!"

To those gathered around, it seemed as if Miss Mattie were repeating parts of the Bible—bits from the Psalms and the New Testament, promises, making firm declarations. Sometimes she spoke aloud. Again she whispered.

Presently the child's sobbing breath calmed. She lay quiet a few moments. No one moved nor spoke. Mrs. Galloway's agitated breathing and the loud ticking of the clock were the only sounds. Ten minutes passed. Then Gracie sat up.

"I'm healed!" she said. "The pain is all gone, Miss Mattie-dear! Thank you so much for reminding me! I dwell in the secret place of the Most High, don't I?"

Without any evidence of surprise, or looking at the perplexed and interested faces around her, the child kissed Miss Mattie, jumped down from her lap, and ran across the floor to where Mr. McCabe sat, holding the baby.

Miss Mattie rose leisurely, ran her hand over her hair, smiled a little wan, absent smile, which made her plain face seem wonderfully sweet, then said briskly, "How's your auntie getting along, Mrs. Galloway?"

The astonished woman sank into the nearest chair. Her legs refused to support her agitated bulk any longer. She attempted to reply, but only emitted a whistling wheeze, like an accordian with a hole in it.

"Now, now!" said Miss Mattie gently. "There's no use being so dumbfounded just because you see a prayer answered. What are you staring at?"

Mrs. Galloway could only point, and, indeed, Mr. McCabe's face mirrored the amazement, incredulity, and perplexity on Mrs. Galloway's, for Gracie had taken Gloria from him and the baby was resting her whole weight on the little girl's burned arm, without the slightest evidence from Gracie of any pain.

"Don't say anything!" urged Miss Mattie. "Act natural about it. Let's talk about something else."

Mrs. Galloway looked through her spectacles at Miss Mattie as if she had never seen her before, and at Gracie, bouncing Gloria in her arms to make the baby laugh. Then she gingerly lifted the bandage on her own arm and looked at it.

"Mine is all red and rawr!" she said. "And sore as a bile! I — I wisht I could git a look at Gracie's!"

"If it will not injure the child!" said Mr. McCabe eagerly.

Miss Mattie hesitated, and then smiled confidently.

"I don't see why not!" she announced calmly. "Gracie, come here, please! Give baby to me and show Uncle Matt your arm. He can't believe in our kind of healing!"

"Oh, can't he?" smiled the little girl. "Why, it's easy, Uncle Matt. Often I can heal myself, but this time Mrs. Galloway hollered and took on so, I got scared and forgot. Look! It is n't even red. It's just as Jesus said, 'restored whole like the other.' If I did n't show you, could you tell which one I thought I burned?"

Mrs. Galloway bent over the child's arms, innocently thrusting her head so close to Mr. McCabe's face that he had to draw back to keep from getting a mouthful of her hair. She adjusted her spectacles, then took them off and wiped them. She attempted to speak once or twice, but gave it up. Mr. McCabe was almost as much interested in her incredulity as in his own. He sympathized with it, in spite of himself.

Miss Mattie relieved the tension with a laugh. "You can't either one of you believe, even after

seeing with your own eyes!" she cried. "You're both of you thinking right now, 'I don't believe the child was burned at all. She was more scared than hurt. Guess she just dreamed she got burned."

"Miss Mattie Morningglory," said Mrs. Galloway, rising to her majestic height and accidentally stepping on Mr. McCabe's foot, "I spilled that coffee myself! I took it off the stove with my own hands, and these eyes of mine saw it boil. I'm tellin' you the truth when I say a full pint of boilin' coffee fell on to that child's bare arm. Don't make no mistake about that. I looked to see blisters half a inch high from her elbow to her wrist. 'Cause that's what I had, 'n' you saw 'em!"

She looked almost angrily at Miss Mattie.

- "I never seen anything like this!" she announced.
- "And you don't half like it!" teased Miss Mattie.
- "No, I don't!" snapped Mrs. Galloway. "It's against nature!"
- "Every miracle the Savior performed was against what we poor mortals call nature!" said Mr. McCabe.

They all looked at him.

- "Why, Uncle Matt!" cried Gracie, gleefully. "You are believing! Did you know it?"
- "I wonder if I am!" said the man, with a whimsical frown.

"I ain't!" declared Mrs. Galloway. "You see if by to-morrow morning Gracie ain't got the sorest arm you ever seen!"

"No!" cried Miss Mattie and Gracie simultaneously. They looked at each other, and smiled with mysterious understanding.

"I must be going!" said Mr. McCabe, rising. "Mrs. Galloway, in the excitement we were not introduced, but I am glad to have had the pleasure of meeting you. It has done me good to hear what you had to say on this subject."

"It was common sense, was n't it?" she asked, bridling.

"Yes,— yes, it was what we call common sense. But, dear lady, when we see what our friend has done before our very eyes, would you not give her credit for possessing and practicing uncommon sense?"

"Well,—maybe," was Mrs. Galloway's reluctant concession to the persuasive eloquence of man.

But it was Mrs. Galloway who went first, after all. The children clamored for Mr. McCabe to stay, and it was not difficult to induce him to yield.

"I see what it is to be putty in their hands!" he said to Miss Mattie, who smiled in reply. "But if I stay, you must not let me interfere. Shall I help Gracie wash the dishes?"

"Sakes alive!" cried Miss Mattie, scandalized.

"As if I'd let a gentleman like you do housework! You just sit right still and let Gracie and Joe do 'em. You can be company while I put baby to bed!"

"Well, Joe, what do you say?" asked the company.

"Oh, Mr. McCabe—" began Joe.

"Tut! Tut!" said that gentleman. "I play no favorites. If I am Gracie's Uncle Matt, I am also yours and Gloria's. I have never had an opportunity to go into the army, but I've always wanted an army title. How would it do if you promote me from 'company' to an uncle—by brevet?"

Miss Mattie, undressing the baby behind the screen, smiled and said to herself:

"Land sakes! He ought to be uncle to a whole orphan asylum, he's so entertaining with children. Now just listen to him promising to rig up a wireless for those boys. I wonder what that wife of his is like! I—I wonder if she appreciates him—or knows what she's got. I'll bet she does n't! There, there my lamb! There! There!"

CHAPTER XIII

Miss Mattie's "Blasphemious Idear" of Christmas

IT WAS near Christmas, and the children were spending all the time they could spare, from work and lessons, in making ornaments and trimmings for a tree — a tree which was to be so beautiful that those fortunate enough to see it would remember it all their lives. Miss Mattie had been at no end of pains to explain the true meaning of Christmas to her children, and her patience in teaching them was inexhaustible.

At first the neighbors were interested in the usual degree and hinted at contributions, and started the stereotyped mystery of Santa Claus and his mission of full stockings for the good.

But one day Gracie accidentally mentioned the fact that she and Joe did not believe in Santa Claus, were not expecting him, and were not to have a tree of their own, but were trimming this one to give away to some children who had never even seen one and who, if not presented with food, would not even have a Christmas dinner.

When the Connors, Mrs. Shapiro, Mrs. Galloway, and Mrs. Meyer discovered that this was Miss Mattie's teaching, and that she had plucked

MISS MATTIE'S "BLASPHEMIOUS IDEAR" 225

her new and very upsetting ideas of Christmas celebration from her Bible, they waxed indignant and called to inquire about it.

"Is it thrue," began Maggie Connor, "that you've told th' childern there ain't no Santy Claus?"

"Yes, I told them that," admitted Miss Mattie. "I think it's such a cruel lie to let it get around—"

"Crool!" cried Mrs. Connor. "What do ye mane?"

"Why, I think it's downright mean in people to teach children that there's a fat man, with ears that hear everything they do and say, specially along about Christmas time, and if they're good they'll get presents, and if they're bad they won't, because the whole thing's a lie—"

Mrs. Galloway sniffed.

"Well, of all things!" she cried. Her three chins were very decisively indicated when she drew her mouth down in such disapproval as she evinced on this occasion.

"Seems to me it's a goot lie!" said Mrs. Meyer. "My shildern are going to hang up zare stockings and have a tree. It will make yours feel bad! You see!"

"Oh, no, it won't!" said Miss Mattie. "I've talked to them. Gracie offered to give hers up, of her own accord."

"Thin it was your fool talk made her!" said

Maggie. "No child wud ever give up a Christmas three witout urgin'."

"I did n't urge her. I just told her what sorrow it brought to poor children who could n't have a tree, and how their poor little hearts ached when they saw more prosperous children with full stockings, when theirs were hung up in all faith but found empty."

A short silence greeted this speech. Miss Mattie had not expected this attack from her neighbors, and her face showed her surprise and distress, for she was a peaceful soul and loved harmony.

"Well, what good will it do to all them childern, if just poor little Gracie 'n' Joe go without theirs?" demanded Mrs. Galloway.

"Well, for one thing, it teaches the truth to my two. That's one good job. If only one person in every family started to turn a lie into the truth, the whole lie would soon be stamped out. For another, it teaches them to be generous. They could keep the tree we're trimming if they wanted to. I told them so. Then it teaches them to love their neighbors as themselves. There's a heap of talk about love, but the kind of love that amounts to something is the love that you feel for your neighbors when you're giving them things they need and are suffering for. I just naturally do despise people that hang around

your neck and are so sorry for you, when you're in trouble, but never do anything for you or give you one thing!"

"Dat is so!" said Mrs. Shapiro. "Miss Mattie is right, Mrs. Meyer!"

"Well, they've found some children who won't even have any dinner Christmas, unless we give them one. We're trimming the tree for them!"

"Zo!" cried Mrs. Meyer. "The lie you will not teach your childern, you will let zem teach others! Zat is very fine!"

"There is n't going to be any lie about it," said Miss Mattie patiently. "We don't pretend to be Santa Claus. We're just neighbors. I believe in being just neighbors with everybody! And that's all we're trying to be to the Eisenhut children. We've told their mother, and, my land, how she does agree with us! She said last Christmas her children most cried themselves sick because other children found presents in their stockings and hers did n't. They said they'd been just as good, and so they had. I told her to tell them there was n't any such man as Santy Claus; it was just parents and friends, and if they'd ask God to send 'em a Christmas, He would!"

"Arrah!" cried Mrs. Connor. "Listen at her! She won't pertend she's Santy Claus! That would be wickut! But she'll pertend she's Gahd! Ain't she got the nerve!"

"I shan't either pretend I'm God! But if it was n't God put it into my heart to do this for her children, I'd like to know who it was! It certainly was n't the devil that's in you, to laugh at me, and make fun of me, and hurt my feelings!" cried Miss Mattie, stung out of her usual calm by their taunts.

The Connors smiled. They often declared that they loved a good scrap. And their conversation bore out the truth of this statement.

"I do not-a make fun," said Mrs. Shapiro. "I find it not-a easy to understan'. You got-a da strange ways, Miss Mattie. You not-a haf a doctor, yet Joe and Grazia, dey get-a bet'. How is dat? I pray! But I not get-a well, when I am seek!"

"That's what I say!" cried Mrs. Galloway. "I don't see why your kind of prayin' should be so much better 'n mine. And none of us neighborwomen can't. It makes us mad!"

"I don't see," said Miss Mattie mildly, "how so kind-hearted a woman as you, Mrs. Galloway, can be so terribly set and obstinate. I've explained it to you the best I can, but you won't try it on yourself nor your old auntie, nor let me."

"I'm perfeckly satisfied with my way of prayin'," said Mrs. Galloway. "I was teached by pious parents, 'n' what's good enough for my father 'n' mother, I guess is good enough for me."

"Well, then, why do you pick at me?" said Miss Mattie. "Why don't you let me alone? If doctors are curing your old auntie and your burned arm—"

"They ain't, 'n' you know it!" reproached Mrs. Galloway. "I've had the best doctors I could get for auntie for the las' three years. Land knows how much I've paid out to 'em! And I've doctored the best I know how for my burn, but I keep a-ketchin' cold in the pesky thing, or else knockin' it, 'n' that keeps it rawr. And all the doctors say about ol' auntie is to give her a good tonic for her stummick 'n' make her as comfortable as possible until she goes!"

"Well," said Miss Mattie, "if that satisfies you—"

"It don't!" bellowed Mrs. Galloway. "Satisfies me! Well, I guess not!"

"Zen why don't you try Miss Mattie's way?" asked Mrs. Meyer. "As long as zare is nossing dangerous ze matter wiz your old auntie—nossing dangerous like ze scarlet fever my children had—"

"The right kind of prayer to God could cure scarlet fever just as quick and as well as it could cure Mrs. Galloway's old auntie," said Miss Mattie. "That is, if you know what kind of a God you're praying to, and what He has already done."

"What has He done?" asked Mrs. Meyer. "You can tell me, and I will not make fun! How do you pray?"

"No!" said Mrs. Shapiro. "We will list'!"

"Well," said Miss Mattie, "take, for instance, me and the children. Suppose I'd gone and cooked up the best dinner that ever was, and they'd come in, hungry as wolves, and I said to them, 'Sit down and eat!' But although they heard me and saw the food, and said 'Yes, ma'am,' when I told them to sit down, they still kept running around the table after me, crying because they were so hungry, and catching hold of my dress and praising my goodness in providing for them, and telling me, in all sorts of oratorical, ministerial, endurance-test prayers how powerful and great I was, but crying with hunger all the time, though the whole room was filled with the steam and smell of hot food,—how long do you believe I'd stand it before I'd set them down in their chairs so hard their teeth would be jarred, and give them a good shake, and say, 'Land sakes! Why don't you stop crying for food and sit down and eat! My work was all done before you came in — before you ever knew you were hungry! Everything is ready. All you've got to do is to eat, and the more you eat the better I'll like it!'"

Mrs. Shapiro and Mrs. Meyer both nodded.

MISS MATTIE'S "BLASPHEMIOUS IDEAR" 231

"I see!" said Mrs. Meyer. "It is laying hold of ze promises of ze good God, just as if zey were true!"

"They are true!" declared Miss Mattie. "You can prove them true!"

"Could I?" asked Mrs. Shapiro, laying her large brown hand, covered with cheap rings, against her white shirred blouse, and leaning forward with eagerness. "I not know even da language!"

"Everybody can," said Miss Mattie, gently. "I am not well educated. I talk awful poor, and I feel it when I meet those that are well educated. When Mr. McCabe talks, I seem to remember when I used language like that and had n't grown careless. And Gracie's questions about correctness shame me. But my language does n't keep me from knowing God's word. The Bible says the disciples were 'unlearned and ignorant men,' yet they did the same kind of work Jesus did. And they left word for us to do it too."

"I got-a da mind to try!" said Mrs. Shapiro, her dark eyes shining with courage.

"Still, I can't see why it should be so!" repeated Mrs. Galloway. "I don't like to see people so different as you are. Why can't you keep to some of the old ways? Why ain't my religion in my church jus' as perductive as yourn? You

make me so mad, talkin' 'n' actin's if you had all o' God there was—"

"I have!" said Miss Mattie, smiling, "but so have you! So has everybody! Use it, and see."

Mrs. Galloway, being unable to answer Miss Mattie, hurried on:

"Now this here blasphemious idear o' Christmas! You had n't ought to deprive them pore children of their Christmas, Miss Mattie. It'll make you enemies."

"I'm not depriving them of any Christmas," said Miss Mattie, amiably. "I'm planning to give them a real idea of what our Elder Brother's birthday ought to mean to us. Have you ever stopped to think what He would say if He came back to earth and found such goings-on as we do to celebrate His birthday?"

"Well, I don't know's I have," said Mrs. Galloway. "What's the matter with it? Ain't it nice and generous to give folks presents and have a good dinner on Christmas?"

Miss Mattie paused, as if to gather momentum.

"I don't believe there is a greater blot on Christianity to-day than the way we celebrate Christmas!" she said at last. "Millions of dollars wasted on presents to people we 'owe' things to, maybe even hate. Why, some people begin to dread Christmas along about the last of January. It's just a hateful custom that

ought to be stopped by law! How many people do you give presents to that you really want to spend money on?"

"Precious few!" said Maggie Connor. "Most of my Christmas presents is so grudged they most burn the paper they're wrapped up in. And I hate one set of cousins so hard, I'd a heap rather give 'em a kick than a present!"

"Ah, but not all!" said Mrs. Shapiro.

"No," said Miss Mattie. "The few we love to give to is what keeps Christmas going. But what Maggie says is true, too. She has to give, because they're cousins—"

"And would talk about me the whole year like pizen if I did n't!" interrupted Maggie.

"Yet that awful forced giving is what we do to celebrate the birthday of the Savior who came to save us from sin and sickness!" cried Miss Mattie.

"Well, but," said Mrs. Galloway, "what would the stores do? And think of the extry people that get employed on account of the Christmas rush!"

"The stores could stand it, I guess! They lay in a lot of cheap stuff they could n't sell to blind people ordinary times, well knowing that thousands will rush in at the last minute to get just any old thing for somebody they've forgotten. You get jammed in the crowd, and you lose your temper and say and do hateful things to people



that push you. You feel the spirit of greed that 's in the very air, and you try to get ahead of women that are in just as big a hurry as you are. Sometimes you act real unladylike. You buy things you don't want and get cheated and imposed on — mostly because you're all wrong yourself, in your ideas of Christmas. His idea was giving, not exchanging! And just as long as we are wrong, we'll reap the sure rewards of our own ways of thinking. For myself, I'm tired of it; I want to try a new way."

She paused, and smiled at the neighbor-women. "I've done all these things myself, so I know. Then the next day after Christmas," she added, "when you go to look your presents over — well!"

"I know!" laughed Maggie. "It just makes you want to scream! If I wrote in my letters of thanks what I reely think of my presents and the people what sent 'em, they'd be after me wit a shillaleh before dark! Why, whad do you think! I give my cousin a near-lace collar one Christmas and the next year she sent it back to me wid her love and Christmas greetin's! Sure, I don't know whether she forgot or done it on purpose. But anyhow, I hate her for it! I hated her before she done it. Cross-eyed, freckle-faced thing!"

Mrs. Meyer spoke up.

"Last year my shildern were invited to the home of zare Sunday school teacher. She is very rich — she live on West End Avenue in a grand house. And her shildern had such rich presents and such a tree zat it made my shildern so envious zey were almost sick. For ze first time zey complain of being so poor. Zey could not understand why Santa Claus made such a difference in his gifts — so much finer and nicer to ze rich shildern!"

"You see!" said Miss Mattie. "I do believe there is more envy and heart burning and jealousy about Christmas than any other day in the year, — yet our Elder Brother came to show us what generosity and self-sacrifice were! He gave Himself. He gave health and happiness to His friends. And they were nearly all poor. Now I want to teach my children to make Christmas a copy of those ideas. It won't hurt them! You see!"

"Gracie says you ain't even going to have a turkey!" said Mrs. Galloway.

"Not for them to eat! We're going to give ours away!" said Miss Mattie cheerfully.

The neighbors rose. It was near supper time, and they had to go. Miss Mattie could see that she had made some impression, yet they were still mutinous and only partially convinced.

They said good-by to her and went out whispering,—all but Mrs. Galloway going out the front door.

A patient, almost sad, smile touched Miss Mattie's lips as she saw Mrs. Galloway in her indignant exit gather up an armful of Gracie's clothes to mend. She knocked over the screen and hit her ankle on a rocking chair on her way out, but she gave vent to no more than a surprised "Ouch!" She looked fiercely at the chair, as if it were to blame for being in the way, adjusted her spectacles, then, seeing there was nothing more that she could do for her neighbor, she said:

"I made cookies to-day. I'll bring some down for your supper, Miss Mattie!" and so creaked across the floor and up the stairs.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN GO SHOPPING

THE next day Miss Mattie found what the whispering had been about. The neighborwomen, led by the warm-hearted but lawless Connors, had decided to take matters into their own hands and get Gracie and Joe what they called "a real Christmas."

They came over en masse about two o'clock to tell Miss Mattie. She listened patiently, and from her natural perspective was able to see in their act more of love than obstinacy, so to their surprise, and possibly to the Connors' disappointment, she made no objection. She even thanked them warmly.

They were in their best clothes, and Miss Mattie admired them frankly, She seated Mrs. Galloway in front of a mirror while she straightened her bonnet and tucked up her hair. Mrs. Shapiro was all in purple, and wore a large hat with three violet ostrich feathers; the Connors were gorgeous in clothes a little too pronounced. Only Mrs. Meyer was dressed in ordinary street costume, simple and neat and appropriate. Mrs. Galloway had put on the black taffeta she usually saved for funerals.

"Now this plan of ours need n't interfere with yours at all," said Mrs. Galloway. "Nor you need n't buy a thing. We're goin' to git the tree 'n' trimmin's 'n' a present or two for their stockin's — that is, if you'll unbend to the extent of lettin' 'em hang 'em up!"

"I will!" said Miss Mattie. "And it's just dear of you to do this for them! I tell you, I appreciate the spirit of it!"

"Shoot!" said Maggie Connor, on their way out. "I thought she'd put up a scrap! She's too tame to be interestin'!"

"She's the best woman that ever lived!" said Mrs. Galloway with solemn indignation. "But misguided!" she added hastily.

Miss Mattie, at her big glass door, watched them let four cars go by before they could squeeze on, and even then the conductor had to reach down and haul Mrs. Galloway up. She lifted her dress with such deliberate care that those on the sidewalk got an excellent view of her side gaiters and white stockings, but as the car sped on she could be seen giving the conductor a piece of her mind, because, in his haste to help her aboard, he had split her dress under the arm.

It was the custom for these neighbors to exchange services with each other. For example, when Miss Mattie went downtown, Mrs. Galloway tended shop for her and looked after the

children. So, on the occasion of this wholesale departure to purchase Christmas presents, Mrs. Meyer's eldest girl stayed with Mrs. Galloway's old auntie; Joe, in his wheeled chair, tended store for Mrs. Shapiro; Maggie Connor left her shop in charge of her apprentice, and Gracie was allowed to take her doll's sewing and spend the afternoon with the three younger Meyer children.

Miss Mattie spent a busy afternoon. She sighed as she thought how much more simple it would have been to plan for the ordinary Christmas for her own children, instead of undertaking the tedious research, - planning and demonstrating the ideal she had long cherished. But one of Miss Mattie's salient characteristics was a willingness to go to no end of trouble to carry out an ideal or to live up to a fixed principle. She was so quiet and unassuming that her closest friends had never suspected her of possessing the acute habit of observation nor the shrewd philosophy which her new life was unfolding. Yet because of her fitness, the work of demonstrating the Truth to her small world had been placed in her hands, in obedience to a fixed law, of whose existence she was ignorant.

For three months Joe and Gracie had been saving their money to buy the dinner for the Eisenhut family. The father was dead and the mother went out by the day, cleaning. Miss

Mattie placed Mrs. Eisenhut's entire time with her customers,—she and Mrs. Galloway taking one day a week for themselves and always sending the woman home with a full basket of food for the hungry children. The Eisenhuts were self-respecting Swiss people, who longed to live up to the memories of the Fatherland, where food, at least, had been plentiful and where anniversaries were made much of.

Miss Mattie, in order to teach her children the value of money, made them decide what to buy and then go and buy it, with the result that they were appalled to find how little could be bought for a dollar.

That one experiment forever cured Gracie of not wanting to eat crusts, and Joe never again refused to eat fat. For the first time they realized what Miss Mattie was doing in undertaking their support.

Miss Mattie furnished the turkey, but even by writing many suggestions on paper, the children found that they were still short of money to buy potatoes.

Miss Mattie let them worry it out. She had not demurred when they bought cranberries and sugar to cook them, even though she saw they had forgotten the potatoes. She realized that a few wholesome mistakes would teach them a lesson that would never be forgotten.

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN GO SHOPPING 241

In a box under the couch-bed lay the hand-somest materials for embroidery that Matt Mc-Cabe's generosity could buy for Gracie. Joe's present was material for wireless—names of which this scribe can neither spell nor understand. But Joe, having a boy's mind, understood and rejoiced exceedingly in the promise of them.

Miss Mattie had that morning received her first note from Mr. McCabe. It asked if he might have the children for a couple of hours the next afternoon, which was Christmas Eve, to take them downtown to see the shops. He promised to come in an automobile which would hold Joe's wheeled chair.

"Do not worry about us, Miss Mattie Morningglory," the note wound up, "but I warn you I am going on a regular bat with your children. I am so excited at the prospect, that even the office boy has called me down for inattention to work."

"Well, if he is n't just the nicest man!" exclaimed Miss Mattie, smiling broadly as she read the note for the third time. "I do hope he will have a happy Christmas! I just know he'll most buy out the town to take down to that mother of his, because he says this is the last Christmas he expects to have her with him, and he's bound to make her have a good one. I wonder if his wife will go with him? Somehow, in spite of all the polite things he says about her, I

can't see her in my mind's eye. She does n't seem to belong. He seems like a widower, or a bachelor to me. I wonder if she's nice to his mother! I know his mother must be a fine woman to have raised such a son! My land! Ain't men wonderful! So smart — so much smarter than women, no matter how bad a few of 'em are! Well, I've got to cut out that chemise for Gracie's doll. She's got the skirt made real cute, with those cunning little stitches of hers! I made a real stylish hat for it and I believe I've got enough white fur left from Maggie Connor's theatre toque to make a muff, and line it with white satin. Would n't that tickle her most to death? I'll get time to do it, after they're in bed to-night — if I'm not too tired! But I won't be! How can I be tired working for my children's first Christmas!"

She sat down with a happy smile on her pale face, and her quick fingers rapidly cut and basted the doll's things for Gracie to finish. It was only five o'clock, but the gas was lighted and it soon would be time to get supper. Baked potatoes and gravy they were to have — and the potatoes were all washed and ready to slip into the oven. If she had time, she thought she would make cocoa for them to drink. If not, milk would do.

The sound of the front door opening and of voices made her stop work. Then the procession

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN GO SHOPPING 243

of tired neighbor-women, headed by Maggie Connor, filed into the back room and dropped, speechless and breathless, into the nearest chairs.

"What's the matter?" asked Miss Mattie. "Tired?"

Mrs. Shapiro shook her head.

"Not tired!" gasped Maggie. "Dead! Stone dead!"

"Why, Mrs. Shapiro!" cried Miss Mattie. "Just look at your hat! Where are your feathers?"

"Her hat got caught in the revolving door and jerked clean off her head," volunteered Maggie. "It was tramped on by a million fool women that ought to be home darnin' their husbands' socks, before she could find it again. The two little feathers was broke, so she t'rew 'em away, and look at the big one!"

"You made-a da hat for me!" cried Mrs. Shapiro. "You know what I pay for eet!"

"Yes, I know!" said Miss Mattie sympathetically. "You leave it here with me and I'll fix it up for you, and make it real pretty again. I won't charge you anything for the work and only cost for materials."

"My feet hurt me something awful!" said Mrs. Galloway in a deep voice. "I always knew they was large, but I never knew before that there was n't nowhere else in the world for people to

step but right on 'em! I do b'lieve a hundred men have tramped on my feet this afternoon, 'n' some women just climbed up on my instep 'n' slid off! I bet you they're skinned!"

"A vomans, she grab-a my cloak in-a da back, and jerk me out of her way!" said Mrs. Shapiro, exhibiting her purple satin cloak, with half a yard of the bead trimming torn off.

"An' Mrs. Shapiro rammed her hatpin into her, good 'n' plenty!" laughed Maggie. "Honest! You'd 'a' thought you was at a dog fight in Eyetalian! And such languaging!"

"Don't you call me a dog fight!" shrieked Mrs. Shapiro. "You old-a maid Irish vomans!"

"Take it easy!" soothed Maggie.
"Me hat is off to you, 'n' I got both feet on it.
I 'pologize in four languages!"

"Let's see what you bought!" said Miss Mattie, in an attempt to avert further personalities.

The neighbors seemed to revive under the suggestion. They sat up and in a moment the room was filled with the rustling of paper and the pleasant sound of the opening of packages.

Maggie Connor rose, stretched her arms above her head, yawned frankly, then strolled over and looked at herself in the long pier-glass.

"Holy Mike! Look ut me!" she exclaimed. "Me skirt is pulled half off! Me hat's crookud! Me belt's gone. I've sphlit one glove, and the

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN GO SHOPPING 245

shoulder to me chiffon waist, holding on to that old strap!"

She revolved in front of the mirror, with her head over her shoulder.

"I'm a sight! I look like a bundle that Mamma ties up!" she said, with a good-natured giggle.

"Come an' help me wit this knot, ye vain hussy!" said her mother, smiling. "I got a doll's set of furnitcher here for Gracie, that'll set her wild. Whisht! Listen! It sounds as if it's broke! If it is, afther all the throuble I had to get ut — snatchin' ut out of the hand of a woman that said she'd take ut, while I was thryin' to make up me mind whether I wanted th' green or th' red satin set! Saints above! Look at ut! Kindlin' wood! Every piece smashed! Sure I know when that happened! When I shoved that man that was diggin' me wit his elbow! I raymimber hearin' something crack when he shoved back!"

"Is n't that a shame!" said Miss Mattie.
"I've got some glue. Maybe we can fix it."

Mrs. Meyer came over and looked at it.

"It's hardly wors' ze trouble," she said. "See how brittle it is! My shildern got a set zey have had two years, but it is better made!"

"Everything they sell yuh around Christmas is li'ble to be phony!" said Maggie. "I worked in a department store oncet. I know what cheap



stuff they shove off on you durin' the last rush! Ma, ye just wasted your ninety-eight cents!"

"Well, look at yer own buyin'!" cried Mrs. Connor. "Sure, I think that ermine muff you got for Gracie is th' queerest lookin' fur I ever seen!"

Maggie snatched the paper from her parcel and shook out the contents. She held it under the gas jet, and then uttered a howl of rage.

"It ain't what I bought, at all, at all!" she cried. "They changed ut whin they wrapped ut up! I paid two dollars and forty-nine cints fer it, marked down from four ninety-eight!"

Mrs. Meyer took it out of Maggie's hand and examined it. Then she handed it back.

"Zat is ze one you bought!" she said. "I counted ze black tails and remember zat two were broken. See, here zey are."

"But it ain't reel!" wailed Maggie. "'T ain't nothin' but rabbit skin! These tails is sewed on! Look!"

"Well, surely you knew you were not getting ze real ermine for zat price!" cried Mrs. Meyer, who knew values as most foreigners and few Americans do.

"Well, but see! The tickut has th' \$4.98 mark crossed off, an' th' \$2.49 written under ut!"

"And you worked in a department store!" said Mrs. Meyer, laughing sarcastically.

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN GO SHOPPING 247

Maggie threw the soiled white muff on the floor and flung herself away from the mirror.

"Drat yer old Christmases, anyway!" she cried. "I'm all tore to pieces! I've give up a whole afternoon, wasted me money, lost me timper, an' been shtung! An' for what? Tell me that now!" She looked ready to cry.

Mrs. Shapiro turned to a box half the size of herself that stood on the floor at her side.

"Never mind, Maggie!" she said. "Ve vill have-a da tree! And da shildern will be pleas'. See! Here I haf all the trim' for eet! I hold it—so! So it shall-a not break!"

She took off the lid and lifted the crushed tissue paper. Miss Mattie helped her to take out the tinseled and glittering objects. Nearly every one was damaged. Either she had selected badly, or they had broken in the box.

Mrs. Galloway listened to their exclamations, which were as fragmentary as the shattered ornaments. She was almost afraid to open her parcels, for she had taken so long to make up her mind that the Connors had rushed her into a decision at the last that had completely upset her, and all the way home in the car she had exasperated Maggie by telling her that she "was n't a mite satisfied 'cause she'd been so hurried."

"I know before I look," she said with solemn gloom, "that I've been stung! I did n't have



time to look around, or make up my mind on anything. I was just rushed and pulled and hauled and tromped on, till if you'd ast me my name I'd 'a' lied to you, 'cause I could n't 'a' remembered it. But I got—"

She reached her hand in and pulled out a doll.

"It's got reel eyelashes!" she said proudly, "I thought Gracie would — why, where are they! She ain't even got any eyes, let alone eyelashes! Listen! They've fell inside o' her head! You kin hear 'em rattlin' around! Now ain't that a shame!"

"Never mind!" said Miss Mattie. "It's a pretty doll. Gracie likes brown-eyed dolls. I can take her wig off and fix her eyes. I've done it often," as she suited the action to the word.

"But this doll's eyes are blue!" said Mrs. Galloway. "I s'lected it a-purpose, 'cause I ast her which she liked best, 'n' she said blue."

"These eyes are brown!" said Miss Mattie, who, having scalped the doll and fished her eyes out, was now holding them up to the light for Mrs. Galloway to see.

"That's your fault, Maggie Connor!" cried Mrs. Galloway fiercely. But for once Maggie did not answer, for Mrs. Galloway, tired and weak, was so angry she had tears in her eyes. "You hurried me, so's I got the wrong doll!

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN GO SHOPPING 249

Now my part of Gracie's Christmas is spoiled. I got roller skates for Joe! Boys alwuz like skates!"

"Roller skates!" cried Miss Mattie, before she thought. "Why, Mrs. Galloway, he can't use them!"

Mrs. Galloway's jaw dropped, until, Maggie Connor said, "you could 'a' drove a ice wagon into her mouth."

"Land o' love!" gasped Mrs. Galloway. "I clean forgot he could n't walk! What'll I do?"

"I'll take them back for you!" promised Miss Mattie. "I'll be down at the store when it opens so I won't get caught in the rush. You tell me what you want in the place of them, and I'll get it."

"You won't neither," said Mrs. Galloway. "I was a fool, 'n' I'll just punish myself by makin' myself go down again on these here sore feet o' mine, to teach me to stay at home next Christmas 'n' not be sich a ole goat!"

Maggie Connor stood in the middle of the floor, with her hands on her hips, and grinned at Miss Mattie.

"You'd ought to be a happy woman, Miss Mattie," she said. "You've let us go 'n' butt our heads into a stone wall 'n' knock ourselves senseless in our obstinacy, 'n' you've just set here 'n' laughed at us! I'd be tickled to death



if I could make fools of five growed-up women at once, like you've done to-day. Every one o' th' things you perdicted has come true!"

"Oh, but I don't look at it that way," said Miss Mattie. "I—"

"Dese candles are red and I bought-a da green!" cried Mrs. Shapiro. "I not like-a da red!"

"Well, but red is Christmas color!" said Miss Mattie. "I'm kind of glad they made the mistake, because I think red is lots prettier!"

But Mrs. Shapiro was not to be appeased. She sat there in her torn finery, her handsome brown face peppered with soot, her lips trembling.

"I so disappoint'— I try-a so hard!" she stammered.

"Mrs. Meyer, show us your mistake!" said Maggie cheerfully.

"I got a music box for Gracie. She's so glad she can hear, she plays wiz ours all ze time. It is a good one, because I tried it. I got a book for Joe. It's about animals."

"I'm afraid," said Maggie, "that ye're in a class by yourself. We can't jine you. Yer presents are all right! Sure, I should think ye'd be lonesome in this bunch!"

"You must n't feel bad, Maggie," said Miss Mattie.

"I'm sore!" declared Maggie. "I hate to know I'm a fool. It's all right to suspect ut.

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN GO SHOPPING 251

Keeps you guessin'! But to know ut! Th' sinsation is far from pleasant!"

"The children will have a lovely tree yet! You see!" affirmed Miss Mattie. "Such love and kindness as you all have shown is n't going to be turned into disappointment."

"Mine was n't so much love as obstinacy," said Maggie. "Sure, I like th' kids well enough, but I hate to be told that my idears of Christmas ain't as highbrow as yours!"

"I never said that," said Miss Mattie, quickly.

"No, but you act ut. And it makes me just as mad."

"I'm sorry," said Miss Mattie simply.

"You're too saintly to be human! Why don't you laugh at us, the way you're dyin' to inside? Why don't you sneer at us fur thinkin' we knew more'n you did, 'n' fallin' down in our proof?"

"I can't explain my theory. I don't know much about it — I have n't the words. I've only got the observation. I've noticed that whatever judgment I pronounce on anybody at any time just as surely comes back on me as that I keep on living. That's why I'm too tame to suit you, Maggie! I'm just trying to keep out of trouble. You know it's a Bible promise that whatever judgment you judge others with, you will be



judged by yourself. It seems to be a kind of law. And, land sakes! How accurate it does work!"

"Well, I don't hate you like I let on!" said Maggie, smiling. "I'm a good friend of yours, Miss Mattie. But I'm so dog tired I'm just lookin' for a bone to growl over!"

"We'll take-a da theengs home an' do-a da bes' we can," said Mrs. Shapiro, more cheerfully.

The others followed her example, gathering up boxes, paper, and strings, Miss Mattie cheering them all she could.

But their chagrin was too deeply rooted to yield at once, especially Mrs. Galloway's, for after the others had gone she still sat there, her large cheeks sagging with weariness and her three chins quivering with disappointment.

"I tried so hard!" she kept saying. "I wanted the childern to have a reel happy, selfish Christmas, just like other childern, 'n' now it looks like our plans is all tore to pieces 'n' we ourselves is mocked by our own desires. I s'pose, as Maggie Connor says, you're glad we've failed. But seems to me I'll just die if I haf to see them two pore little afflicted childern, that never had no Christmas in their lives, turn and give away their tree! But we can't have no satisfact'ry tree with the mess we brought home, an' they can't spare time to go back 'n' do it all over! Our hopes is gone!"

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN GO SHOPPING 253

Miss Mattie pondered, chin in hand.

"Well," she said, "if it's going to make you feel so bad, I'll give in. No ideal of mine is worth causing suffering to such a good, sweet friend as you are to me and the children. I'll let them have both, and if I pitch in and work real hard, we can make enough trimmings for both trees to-morrow, and the presents can be managed somehow! I'll drop everything else, and help you all I can. I'll let them hang up their stockings, and we'll fill them, if it'll give you any pleasure, and we can see whose way is best. Then we'll give a Christmas to the Eisenhuts besides. It'll be a lesson — to me, anyway."

"I know my way is the best!" said Mrs. Galloway firmly. "But—" she hesitated before the gentle smile of renunciation on Miss Mattie's face—"if you're as set as I be, it's handsome of you to give up, 'cause it's like pullin' teeth with me. It ackshilly hurts me here!" And she laid her capacious hand upon her breast.

"I hope it does n't hurt you there when you have a tooth pulled!" laughed Miss Mattie. "Well, it does n't hurt me anywhere! There's too much love for you in my heart for me to hate to give up to you. And a real Christmas is sacrifice, anyway!"

Mrs. Galloway, reminded of her victory and of the pleasure in store for herself, rose up looking



like another woman. Her fatigue was gone; her eyes sparkled; her large face was wreathed in smiles of pleased anticipation.

"I'm goin' to go downtown early to-morrer by myself!" she announced. "I'll show that Maggie Connor whether I'm a shopper or a fool Nanny goat! Gimme that doll an' them there skates!"

And with only one false start, which scraped her elbow, she got safely through the door, which she left unlatched.

CHAPTER XV

THE NICE SELFISH CHRISTMAS IS PREPARED

OWHERE in the whole street did the spirit of Christmas dwell in such omnipresence as in the little millinery shop of Miss Mattie Morningglory.

All the next day things fairly buzzed. The children's tree was to be trimmed in the back room of Mrs. Shapiro's fruit store, and when the neighbor-women gathered there for the purpose, great was the rejoicing when it was noised abroad that Miss Mattie had yielded to the voice of the people—ever a popular proceeding, as all crowned heads realize!—and had promised to let Joe and Gracie have, in Mrs. Galloway's language, "a reel nice selfish Christmas like all the rest of the childern in the world!"

At Miss Mattie's a similar rite was being performed. The tree for the Eisenhut family stood in the middle of the floor, while Miss Mattie and Gracie circled around it on foot, and Joe propelled himself in his wheeled chair, sometimes, in his excitement, standing up to adjust a toy or to steady a candle.

Every now and then Miss Mattie tested their sincerity.



"Is n't it too bad," she would say, "that this is n't for us! Just think how it's going to look all lit up! Don't you wish you believed in Santa Claus and were going to hang up your stockings and hop out of bed before daylight to look at 'em, like other children?"

Gracie's eyes grew round with surprise.

"Why, Miss Mattie-sweet," she said, "we have two pleasures this way! Trimming and giving it! And we are sure to get some presents! I know of two! And that's enough, because we have so much all the time. And the Eisenhuts never have enough to eat—the boy told me so!"

Miss Mattie nodded her head, well satisfied. It was fascinating work to fill five new stockings, whose empty mates were attached to each bulging receptacle. Every one in the house and neighborhood had contributed. Mrs. Shapiro sent nuts and fruit. The Connors sent raisins and candy. The Steenie Knoblochs sent down five new pairs of shoes, which were mysteriously of the right sizes, while Steenie's mother had knitted the same number of mittens with her own hands and honest German wool.

Mrs. Meyer baked the most wonderful set of ginger cookie soldiers with black currant eyes—enough for the Eisenhuts as well as for Joe and Gracie and Bob and Gloria—and Kurt Vogelsang

sent delicatessen dainties which would make the Eisenhuts dream of the Fatherland for many weeks to come.

When it came to Gloria, it seemed that an epidemic had broken out in the whole neighborhood, for there arrived such a profusion of crocheted dogs and calico cats; such woolly animals of every gender and religious persuasion; such an array of celluloid dolls garbed for every season; such toys to feel and touch and hear and smell — everything, alas, except to see! Tears were in the eyes and trembled in the voices of every one who brought a toy for the blind baby, whose beauty and sweetness had won all hearts — hearts which ached with an honest human sympathy because her eyes were closed to all the beauty and shining splendor of the happy things the other children could see.

Miss Mattie's hands and feet and tongue flew. She was everywhere at once. The kindliness of the neighbors astonished her, and filled her simple soul with thankfulness so unspeakable that she could only squeeze the hands of the donors and look at them, until they turned away, unable to bear the earnestness of her gratitude.

By noon, the tree was finished. It glittered with shining ornaments, while strings of popcorn and cranberries draped its green boughs with hints of coming usefulness. Red and white



tarleton bags of candy, nuts, and raisins were scattered about, many more than the Eisenhut children would need, for Miss Mattie shrewdly suspected that the advent of the tree would so rapidly increase the popularity of the family, that it would be well to prepare for the onslaught.

Baby Gloria seemed to know that something unusual was going on, for she was very still and turned her head toward where the sound of fun and excitement was greatest, listening intently. She was not left out of anything, for Gracie could not be happy unless she shared every joy with Gloria, which had so won the baby's devotion that the two were almost inseparable. As for Miss Mattie, she was never too busy or too preoccupied to hold the thought of perfection for Gloria, and she never looked at the little creature that her whole soul did not declare, with knowledge and understanding, that the child could see that tree.

After a hurried meal, at which every one was too excited to eat, Miss Mattie got the children ready for the greatest event of their lives—a ride in a big automobile and a view of the great shops, in the company of the most wonderful man in their small world.

After agonized scrubbing of small bodies and much clean starchiness, heads were brushed so vigorously (for when Miss Mattie was excited she wielded a heavy hand) that tears came. But finally even Miss Mattie ceased to call them back from the front door to have a handkerchief added or to be smoothed or dusted. Joe Campbell's whole body was trembling as he sat in his wheeled chair in the salesroom, receiving bulletins from Gracie, whose nose was shapeless from being pressed against the big glass door.

Finally, with a rush, the big machine drove up and Mr. McCabe sprang out, his entire appearance breathing Christmas suspense.

It was a breathless moment for all, Miss Mattie, in seasons of dire excitement, losing her poise entirely and becoming the youngest and most headless person in the group.

Not so Mrs. Galloway. She assumed command of everything, and the skill with which she managed to get in everybody's way at once amounted almost to genius. When the chauffeur seized the wheeled chair to carry it out, Mrs. Galloway's ponderous form blocked the doorway and held it against all comers. When Mr. McCabe lifted Joe in his arms, Mrs. Galloway suddenly stepped backward and nearly knocked them both down. And when the excited children were safely in the big car, and the chair snugly stowed away in front, Mrs. Galloway took her stand in the middle of the big glass doorway and appropriated all the smiles and handwavings to



herself, leaving Miss Mattie to stoop down and look from under her neighbor's large, pendulous arm.

"Now, ain't they goin' to have a good time!" smiled Mrs. Galloway, dropping her hand suddenly and striking Miss Mattie's unsuspicious nose with her elbow. "Wisht we was goin', too!"

Miss Mattie shook her head.

"They'll have a better time without us!" she said. "We're nearly always with them — all us women — and sometimes I think maybe it holds them back. The society of a man — a fine, educated, moral man like Mr. McCabe, can't help being good for them, so I'm kind of glad he did n't ask us, though I know he'd have given us a good time. Besides, have you any idea how much there is to be done before midnight? Let's take the stockings for your tree and the things to fill them, up to your rooms, so your old auntie can have some o' the fun!"

"She'll bite our heads off!" said Mrs. Galloway pleasantly. "But she'll enjoy doin' it, so les' let her bite! But first, I gotta red up here a little. Ef I don't, you'd be usin' stilts to walk over the trash before night. Land sakes! I don't see how you can make so much litter, Miss Mattie! You ain't got a mite o' orderliness in yer whole system!"

She worked as she talked, leaving Miss Mattie to attend to Gloria, and in a quarter of an hour she had put to rights a room which would have daunted three women of ordinary capacity.

She drew out the clothes basket and in it piled all the materials for their work. Then she took the baby from Miss Mattie's arms and seated her in the basket in the midst of the candy, popcorn, and tarleton bags; whereupon her little hands began to reach out and touch the fascinating things which smelled so sweet and crackled so bewitchingly. Then Mrs. Galloway issued the crisp order of "Catcha-holt!" and with the basket between them, they climbed the stairs to Mrs. Galloway's rooms, where old auntie lay in the big bed, her brown wrinkled face looking so small and wicked on the snowy expanse of pillow. A bell was suspended outside the window and a stout cord connected it with the head of the bed where the invalid could easily reach it. On a table stood everything else she could possibly need, arranged in neat and snowy order.

"We've come up to let you see us make the candy stockin's for the childern's tree to-morrer," said Mrs. Galloway, pleasantly.

"And we've brought the baby!" chimed in Miss Mattie.

"Passle o' fools!" was the old lady's welcoming remark.

Miss Mattie stopped midway in the room.

"What did she say?" she asked in astonishment.



"She called us a 'passle of fools'!" said Mrs. Galloway. "But you need n't pay no attention to her. It's her spite keeps her up. She's lived on her meanness all her life, 'n' I b'lieve she'd die in her tracks without it. She hates me. I never, in all my born days, saw such a natural hater. Ain't you the spitefulest old witch that ever growed, Auntie?"

The old lady smiled, seemingly pleased with her odd compliment. Miss Mattie stood looking at her, with a curious expression on her face. The brown visage on the pillow looked like a gargoyle. When she smiled, her sharp nose and thin pointed chin almost touched each other in a malicious friendship. Her little shining black eyes snapped wickedly.

"Wonder if she'd like to see the baby?" asked Miss Mattie.

"Yes, if you don't hold her too clost. Auntie'll claw her if you let Gloria get within her reach."

Miss Mattie looked horrified for a moment. Then she recovered herself. She walked to the window and stood looking out and whispering to Gloria, who listened intently and then remarked with smiling earnestness, "Ah, da!"

"Listen to the lamb!" bubbled Mrs. Galloway.
"Lemme have her, Miss Mattie! You have her so much, and me so seldom! Land of the livin'! If she ain't a beauty! And to think what she

was when we found her! I declare to gracious, I'll never get over it! Look, Auntie! This is the baby me 'n' Miss Mattie found in the area—remember what I told you?"

The old lady nodded maliciously.

"I rickollec' what you told me," she mumbled, with a knowing look at Miss Mattie. "But I never b'lieved it! Never for one minute!"

Then she beat the bed with both hands and went off into a series of metallic cackles, which sounded like a lot of hens dropping their remarks into a covered tin pan while some one was shaking it.

Mrs. Galloway's broad expanse of face colored slowly, but Miss Mattie, innocent of all innuendo, was sitting on the floor by the side of the big clothes basket, cutting out tarleton candystockings and whipping them together with embroidery silk.

"Come and set Gloria down here by me," said Miss Mattie, "and show her how to fill the stockings. Let's let the little soul feel she's got a hand in the Christmas doings!"

When Mrs. Galloway plumped herself on the floor it loosened the plastering in the room beneath. But she was blissfully unconscious both of her weight and clumsiness unless exhibitions of it ran in serial form.

Miss Mattie, even in the midst of all the fun,



kept her mind on the old lady. She could not believe in any necessity for her being either bedridden or so animated with hate. Miss Mattie kept talking to her also, but at first the old woman snapped out her vicious replies, repulsing Miss Mattie's every effort. Then she suddenly grew silent, and Mrs. Galloway forgot her.

Gloria babbled delightfully and seemed enraptured with a lapful of candy and nuts. Mrs. Galloway became so interested in trying to make Gloria let go of the things and drop them into the stockings that when she heard the old lady's rasping voice, she jumped.

"Land sakes, Auntie! How you scairt me! Wha'd you say?"

"I said I wanted to git up!"

Mrs. Galloway's red face paled.

"You — you want to what?" she stammered.

"I want to git up! I want to git up! You numbskull!" shrieked the old woman, kicking her feet and pounding the coverlet with her wicked little claws.

Mrs. Galloway's jaw dropped and she looked in a dazed way at Miss Mattie, who sat smiling at her expectantly. Then an idea dawned in Mrs. Galloway's mind.

"Miss Mattie Morningglory," she wheezed, "hev you been prayin' any o' them hor'bul,

blasphemious prayers o' yourn, for old auntie?"

"I've been declaring she was one of God's little ones, just the same as Gloria is!" said Miss Mattie confidently.

"Just same as Gloria!" roared Mrs. Galloway. "That hidjus old sinner just like this—this little angel? Miss Mattie, you're plumb sakkereligious! That's what you are! You'll be declaring that my ole tin oven is the Ark of the Covenant next!"

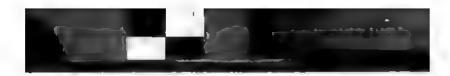
"I want to git up! Come 'n' help me, ye varmint!" cried the old lady.

The "varmint" obediently scrambled to her feet. But she shot a revengeful look at Miss Mattie.

"If you've gone 'n' prayed her well enough to git around, I'll never forgive you, Miss Mattie," she said in a quivering voice. "The only reason I took her — the only way I kin stand her — is 'cause she's bedrid 'n' can't git at me. On her feet, she'd be worse 'n' a fit o' sickness. I'd a heap ruther have it! Yes, I'm a-coming, Auntie! You want to be wrapped in a shawl 'n' set up?"

"No! I want my stockin's on! I want my gray wrapper! I'm goin' to git up 'n' set in a rockin' chair 'n' rock! I ain't rocked for ten year!"

With a gasp of dismay, Mrs. Galloway obeyed.



As Mrs. Galloway bent over, the old lady clawed her spectacles off and threw them to the foot of the bed. Mrs. Galloway said nothing. She did not even put them on again, being too dazed.

She went to the closet, brought her aunt's clothes and started to put them on. She was safe while occupied with the stockings and felt slippers, but when she got near enough to slip on the gray wrapper, the old lady pulled her hair, pinched her until the tears came, and then, with a shriek of joy, old auntie caught the large pink lobe of Mrs. Galloway's ear and twisted it viciously.

"Quit that, you mean old nutcracker!" cried Mrs. Galloway, slapping at the little thin claw which clung to her ear like an animated earring. She turned fiercely to Miss Mattie.

"You see what you've done? She hain't had this much stren'th fer years!"

Tears ran unchecked down Mrs. Galloway's large face.

Miss Mattie rose from her cramped position on the floor and went over to the bed.

"Go play with Gloria and leave your old auntie with me!" she whispered.

Mrs. Galloway pressed her lips together and tossed her head with an air at once gently resentful and mildly threatening. Then she picked up the

baby and an apronful of bulging Christmas stockings and marched to the door.

"I'm goin' to do worse than that!" she said.
"I'm a-goin' downstairs. You got me into this mess, an' I'll jus' leave you to git out of it as best you can!"



CHAPTER XVI

MATT McCABE HELPS OUT

WHAT went on in that upstairs room while Miss Mattie and the old lady were together Mrs. Galloway never knew. But an hour later her surprise rendered her temporarily speechless when she saw Miss Mattie's tall, thin figure appear in the doorway, carrying in her arms the tiny form of "old auntie," who weighed less than Gracie.

In obedience to a look, Mrs. Galloway drew Gracie's cane rocking chair close to the stove and flung a shawl over it. Then Miss Mattie gently deposited her frail burden in such comfort that the old lady sighed involuntarily.

Miss Mattie stepped back and beamed on her.
"Now then! Is n't this nice? Are n't you comfortable?"

The old lady made a face at her.

"'T ain't so bad! But I've seen better!" she mumbled ungraciously.

Miss Mattie gave her a reproachful look.

"Now be careful, Auntie! Remember what you promised!" she said.

The old lady grinned, exhibiting her brown, toothless gums.

"I'll be good!" she said, mowing and mumbling with her loose lips.

Mrs. Galloway gasped.

"Ye varmint!" said the old lady, suddenly catching sight of her niece.

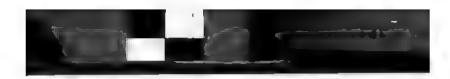
She said it in a pleasantly conversational tone, and Mrs. Galloway dutifully made no reply. Her auntie's quick, intelligent eyes roved rapidly around the big room, taking in every article it contained, and snapping with the pleasure of being in a new and more cheerful environment. She rocked back and forth in the small chair with passionate enjoyment.

Mrs. Galloway watched her in set despair.

"Oh, my Lord!" she groaned. "I never would a b'lieved she could get up that much stren'th! What if she should git well!"

"I'm goin' to!" jeered the old lady, nodding her head and rocking viciously. "Miss Mattie says so! I kin walk! There ain't no such thing as pain. I ain't bedrid! I'm goin' to walk like other people! You'll see! Ye varmint!"

Mrs. Galloway flung her apron over her head and was just going into the enjoyment of what she called "a good cry" when the loud honking of an automobile horn announced the arrival of the children. Mrs. Galloway lifted her head and listened. If it proved a false alarm, she intended to go right on with her crying. But she



held her emotion in suspense until she made sure.

"That's them!" she cried, dropping her apron and starting to her feet. "I kin hear every one of 'em talkin' at oncet!"

They raced in — Mr. McCabe, Gracie, and Bob, the chauffeur supplying the only dignity the party had to bless itself with, as he slowly pushed the wheeled chair in their lively wake.

"Oh, Miss Mattie -- "

"What do you think?"

"We've had such fun!"

"Bob met us at the door, and --"

Then they all stopped, for suddenly they caught sight of the odd little figure by the stove.

"It's Mrs. Galloway's old auntie!" said Miss Mattie, with a beaming smile.

Gracie gave a squeal of delight. She dropped her bundles on a chair, ran quickly to the old lady, and flung her arms around her neck before any one could stop her. Then she drew back with a shriek.

"Oh, oh! She pinched me!" cried Gracie.

Enraged by her darling's pain, Mrs. Galloway made a lunge for the old woman and shook her until her head was nearly wrenched from her feeble neck.

"I'll larn ye!" cried Mrs. Galloway. "Pinch her again, will ye? Take that! And that!" and she cuffed both her ears soundly.

The old lady, when Mrs. Galloway finished, sank into a dilapidated heap and began to whimper. She looked appealingly at Miss Mattie.

"I am not one bit sorry for you!" declared Miss Mattie. "For if anybody ever needed a good drubbin' it's you! Are n't you ashamed of yourself, to want to hurt my dear little girl, who was just loving you! I've the best mind in the world to carry you right back upstairs and put you to bed again!"

"Don't ye, Miss Mattie!" quavered the old woman. "I won't do it again! Ever! I'm sorry! Come here, Gracie! Get another chair 'n' set by me, 'n' les's rock!"

"No, Gracie is n't going near you again!" said Miss Mattie firmly.

"You just bet she ain't," said Mrs. Galloway. "You gotta learn to behave first. If you ever pinch or slap anybody again, I'll get a cage 'n' put you in it. Then I'll lock the door 'n' feed you through the bars, just 's if you was the mean ol' Poll Parrot you ack like!"

At this threat the old woman shrieked with rage and fear, kicked her feet on the floor, and bounced up and down in her chair. They all watched her, appalled by the fury of her paroxysm.

"Woman!" roared Mr. McCabe in a tone of thunder.

The old lady jumped and stopped short,



staring at him dumbly. He advanced upon her, taking long strides and glaring fiercely. She turned pale, and shrank into herself.

Mrs. Galloway smiled in triumph.

"That there'll fix her!" she whispered. "She's scairt to death of a man. Her husband used to beat her when he was alive. I've always been sorry he died so soon. He was the only one ever kep' her in order. Watch her straighten up now 'n' behave. 'N' this'll be permanent!"

Any one who has ever watched the behavior of a monkey when the hand-organ man pulled his string, can picture the antics of the little old woman when a man appeared on her horizon. No longer had she the patience of husbandless women to try. Her master was there. She blinked her small eves at him. She mumbled her loose mouth. She clutched at her thin chest. She moved her feet ingratiatingly. Her attitude was a beseeching not to strike. Out of her dim memory came the awful recollection of a heavy hand, of the pain of blows, the poor, aching flesh, the terrified tears. Then suddenly, like a gleam of light through a blackened sky, flashed the new words of hope she had learned that day, and to Mr. McCabe's confusion came the surprising declaration from between her toothless gums:

"There is no pain!"

Tears filled Miss Mattie's eyes. She ran

forward and stilled the frightened beating of the feeble heart in the old woman's breast, crying out:

"Oh, Auntie! He won't touch you! He's just playing! Don't tremble so, you poor dear. Now, then! Just tell him you'll be good, and then we'll hear about the children's good times!"

"I'll be good! Honest, I will! Don't beat me!" she whispered.

Much abashed, Mr. McCabe stammered a reassurance, but Mrs. Galloway completely restored his equilibrium by the earnestness of her congratulations.

"Don't you be so soft-hearted, Mr. McCabe!" she said. "I never was so glad in my life as I was to see you scare the life clean out of her. She clawed me to-day till I like to cried. I just wisht you lived near enough so's I could call you in when I hafta change her close. She most scratches my eyes out. Gracie, lemme see where she pinched yuh! The ol' idol!"

"It did n't hurt much! It just surprised me!" chirped the child. "But oh, Mrs. Galloway-honey! If you could see what we've seen this afternoon! And then the automobile is so grand! And we bought—"

"Look out, Gracie," cried Bob, "or you'll tell something you don't want to!"

Gracie clapped her hand over her mouth and looked drolly from one to another. The cloud

lifted. Everybody forgot the little rocking figure by the stove, and interest centered in the four adventurers of the afternoon.

It required much skill to remember what not to tell, and much furtive examination to discover what not to open. The shape and size and delightful suggestiveness of the parcels were most exciting, as were also the scraps of conversation.

Miss Mattie flew about like a distracted hen with a brood of newly hatched chicks, listening, answering, encouraging, and yet trying to produce order out of chaos.

"I am in despair, Miss Mattie," said Mr. McCabe. "I wanted to be here to see the Eisenhuts receive their tree,— I am not to have a tree this year!— but I must leave to-night if I am to reach the farm in time to wish my mother a merry Christmas!"

Miss Mattie stopped in the act of opening the oven door. Still sitting on her heels, she "slewed around," as Mrs. Galloway expressed it afterwards.

"Can't we fix it?" she began vaguely. Her eyes wandered to the finished tree standing in the corner of the room. "I wonder if we could n't manage—" she cupped her chin in her hand and balanced herself by spearing the floor with the toasting fork. "I believe— if you could spare the time to stay—"

"What's the matter with giving it to them

to-night!" blurted out Bob Avery. "We're all here! I could get an express wagon. Say, Miss Mattie, you know the driver, Sam Byers, that brought you 'n' Joe home in his hack? Well, his brother-in-law runs an express wagon. I could get that!"

"We could pile everything, dinner and all, in an express wagon!" said Mrs. Galloway, excitedly.

"And Joe, in his chair!" cried Gracie.

"We could all go in it!" shrieked Miss Mattie, collapsing on the floor by reason of the brilliancy of her latest idea. "Oh, what fun! It being Christmas Eve, nobody would care or say a word! I have n't ridden in a wagon since I was a girl! What do you say, Mr. McCabe?"

Mr. McCabe was snuffing the air like a hound that catches the scent.

"May I ask," he said in a sepulchral tone, "if you have a roast ham in that oven, madam?"

Miss Mattie rose to her knees and crawled to the stove. With the toasting fork she opened the oven door, and the rich aroma of burned sugar in ham fat filled the room.

Miss Mattie wiped the toasting fork on a cup towel and harpooned the ham.

"It'll be done in about three quarters of an hour!" she said. "Do you like it, Mr. McCabe?"

"Do I like it?" reproached that gentleman. "I'd sell my soul for a roast ham like that one!"



"Then go send away that expensive automobile and stay to supper with us! Bob, you run out and tell that express-wagon man to be here in an hour and a half. This ham, Mr. McCabe, is to be our Christmas dinner tomorrow, cold, because we are not going to have a turkey for ourselves—"

A shout of laughter from the children interrupted her. Mr. McCabe was laughing also, but silently.

Gracie and Bob flew to a huge brown paper parcel that lay on the table, and tore it open. Then Bob held up by the legs a turkey that must have weighed at least twenty-five pounds. It made the modest one Miss Mattie had bought for the Eisenhuts seem like a spring chicken.

Mrs. Galloway's face was a study. She gloated ecstatically. Miss Mattie's eyes danced, but she bit her lip.

"It's no use!" she whispered, more to herself than to any one else. "I've tried to make the birthday of the Master a simple and sacrificing day, but the people won't let me."

"I should take it," said Mr. McCabe, who had caught her low murmur, "that this wholesale contributing to your children's Christmas was the direct and speedy result of their unselfishness. I have often observed that the law operates in just that manner!"

"That the law operates in just that manner," repeated Miss Mattie, in whose ears the musical arrangement of Mr. McCabe's well-chosen words, sang itself in a rhythm her whole soul coveted.

"Oh, Mr. McCabe!" she said. "You've got them both! The ideas and the beautiful language to express them in! I've got the thoughts—they come to me in the night, when I'm studying my Bible, sitting at the feet of the Master. But I have n't got the satisfying words that you have! Hearing you makes me so ashamed of the way I talk. I used to know better. My mother and father talked as you do, but—I have lived here so long, I have grown careless. If only you'd teach me to remember! Would you?"

Deeply touched by the sincerity and earnestness of her innocent flattery, and regardless of the cup towel and toasting fork, the tall man bent over her and took her hand.

"My dear — friend!" he stammered. "You humiliate me! It is I who need to learn of you! Surely you must know that there is not another woman like you in all this world!"

"I'm glad there is n't!" said Miss Mattie decidedly. "Most of them have more education—they can talk better and they were born smarter. I can't do a thing well, except make hats!"

"Except make hats'!" repeated Mr. McCabe.

He turned and looked at Mrs. Galloway, who nodded. "Well!" he went on. "We have no time to lose! Is everything ready for to-morrow? Is their dinner complete? Will they have chairs to sit on, and dishes to eat from, and —"

"I declare to gracious," cried Miss Mattie, "there is n't a dish in the house! They've either broken or pawned everything! They've been sick a lot, and never let us know, they're so proud! I'll have to lend them some of mine. We can get along somehow—"

"Wait!" cried Mr. McCabe. He seized his coat and hat. "Come, Gracie, I need your taste in selecting. I never go shopping without a woman! It is not safe. The automobile is at the door. Delay dinner fifteen minutes, if you can, Miss Mattie. I will get, as my contribution, a set of dishes and instruments of torture to devour with! It will be more interesting than a cheque."

He caught Gracie by the hand, and together they raced through the salesroom and the others heard the great glass door slam behind them.

CHAPTER XVII

OLD AUNTIE PULLS THE CAT'S TAIL

ISS MATTIE indicated old auntie by a nod. "What'll you do with her?" she asked in a low tone.

"I dunno! I've been wonderin'. D' you reckon old Mrs. Knobloch would come and set with her for a couple o' hours? We won't be gone longer 'n that!"

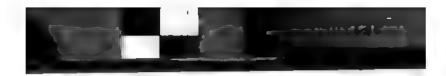
"I should think so," answered Miss Mattie.

"What are you two idjits whisperin' about?" demanded the old lady. She eyed Gracie's cat, Herbert, who was majestically pacing to and fro, surprised to find his snug place by the stove taken by a stranger.

"We was wonderin' who we'd git to set with you while we was gone," answered Mrs. Galloway. "We're goin' to play Santy Claus to that there poor family I was tellin' you about — you know — Mrs. Eisenhut, that cleans for us. I'm goin' to ask ol' Mrs. Knobloch."

"I won't have her! I don't want to be left with nobody!" shrieked the old woman, dancing in her chair. "I want to go with you! I'm well! There is no pain! Miss Mattie says so!"

"Oh, you could n't go with us this time! We're



going this evening, and it's dark outside!" coaxed Miss Mattie. "Be good and stay in to-night, and we'll bring you down here to-morrow to see the children's tree! Won't that be nice?"

The old lady sat so still they thought she acquiesced. They did not see the signs of agitation in her wrinkled brown face. They went on setting the table and laying supper. Joe was in the salesroom.

Suddenly the cat gave vent to a series of spittings and caterwaulings and howls of anguish, and when they looked they saw that the old lady had seized his tail in both hands and was pulling it with all her might, while the cat, his claws dug deep into the carpet, was doing his best to get away from his captor, and holding his own valiantly in the tug-of-war.

Miss Mattie and Mrs. Galloway both rushed toward her, but the old lady held on until they unclasped her hands by main force. Her wicked little black eyes were snapping with fury.

"Oh, how could you be so cruel?" cried Miss Mattie. "That poor cat! You've hurt him awfully!"

"There is no pain!" jeered the old lady. "I'm well! The cat's well. It did n't hurt him!"

Miss Mattie's eyes filled with tears. Mrs. Galloway started to laugh, but when she saw Miss Mattie's tears she changed her mind with

OLD AUNTIE PULLS THE CAT'S TAIL 281

lightning rapidity, and fetched old auntic a resounding slap instead.

"I'm glad to hear you say so!" she said grimly. "Cause then this don't hurt you, nor this neither! Now, I'm goin' to tell Gracie what you done to her kittie, 'n' if she says you must go upstairs 'n' stay in the dark all the evening, without no supper 'n' no Mrs. Knobloch, why, you're goin' to do it. That's all! You just wait till she comes!"

The old lady mumbled her toothless gums in fright.

"In the dark?" she whispered. "Can't I hev even a can'le?"

"Not 'nless Gracie says so! You're too mean to live — abusin' the cat I give her! 'N' she loves it so! You ol' image!"

The old lady sat silent for a few moments. Finally two small tears coursed down her wrinkled cheeks. She gazed up at Miss Mattie, who was regarding her with a look of almost infinite compassion. Miss Mattie sighed, and then smiled.

"I believe the devil's gone out of her, Mrs. Galloway," she said. "Surely you know there was one in her! Nobody behaves like that naturally, when you realize that she is one of God's little ones — created in *His* image — that's the kind of image she is!"

Mrs. Galloway opened her mouth to speak, then closed it again. What was the use!

"The ham's done!" she said, with hopeless resignation. "Shall I use your big turkey platter? I'm goin' to dish up!"

She got no answer, for Miss Mattie was kneeling beside old auntie, with her arms around the old woman's neck, and what they were whispering about Mrs. Galloway neither knew nor cared. She dished up indeed, breaking a teacup and spilling gravy over her clean white apron.

She looked at the clock.

"Come, Joe!" she called. "Go wash your hands! It's quarter to six, 'n' that there man is so promp' he's mostly ahead of himself, if I'm any judge o' human nature! There! I hear 'em now! Miss Mattie, you goin' to let me tell Gracie on ol' auntie, like I said?"

The old woman looked frightened, and tightened her arms around Miss Mattie's neck.

"Don't tell her! Don't tell her!" she whispered.

"We bought—" began Mr. McCabe—"tell them, Gracie!"

The child was too excited to talk. She squealed with unspeakable delight, darting about Joe's chair like a firefly.

"Come 'n' eat!" urged Mrs. Galloway, smiling blandly on the excited children. "We ain't got much time! I wonder what's keepin' Bob so long."

OLD AUNTIE PULLS THE CAT'S TAIL 283

They all gathered around the table.

"Gracie! Gracie!" came in a trembling voice from behind them.

The child turned.

"I pulled your kittie's tail," quavered the old woman, "but it did n't hurt him! There is no pain! Now kin I hev a can'le, niece Galloway? You ain't mad at me, be ye, Gracie?"

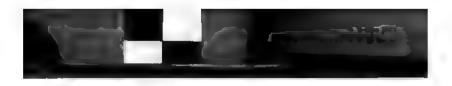
"Of course I'm not! You didn't mean to pull Herbert's tail, did you? Miss Mattie-love! Couldn't old auntie have Joe's chair and sit up to the table with us? Joe is able to sit in a —"

"No!" thundered Mrs. Galloway. "She's too mean! I ain't a-goin' to see her git well so fast! D' you want to kill me? She can't set in Joe's chair 'n' come to the table! I won't hev it!"

The old lady began to cry softly — not in anger as she used to do. She sobbed like a child. Mr. McCabe fixed a beseeching gaze — comical yet urgent — upon Mrs. Galloway. She met it, and weakened palpably.

"Well—" she began, and broke down, smiling helplessly.

In a trice Mr. McCabe spilled Joe out of his chair — in fact, they all held their breath to see how the paralyzed boy had to scramble to reach another seat — and in a triumph so overt and malicious that it was laughable, old auntie was rolled to the table and took her place with the



rest. She grinned her toothless grin at Mrs. Galloway, who resolutely looked away from her.

Presently Bob burst into the room, incoherently explaining how long it had taken him to find Sam Byers, the driver, but he had finally got hold of him and he would be here on time —

A strangled cry, which came from Joe and was caused by a mouthful of ham going down the wrong way, while Joe waved and gesticulated, caused momentary consternation.

"Land o' love! Beat him on the back! He's chokin' to death!" cried Mrs. Galloway.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. McCabe.

It was Bob who solved the problem. He looked in the direction Joe was pointing with his fork, and saw Herbert contentedly eating the neck of the turkey, with perfect assurance that the delectable feast had been provided for him by the kind-heartedness of the family. Such is the nature of a cat.

At least, such is the first conclusion of a cat. But when this particular cat saw four persons rise from the table and stampede in his direction, it did not take him long to decide that they were headed for him and that their intention was to divorce him from his glorious repast. Herbert tore valiantly at the long neck of the Christmas bird, but its resistance was too much for him, so he jumped, and the bird, being on the extreme

OLD AUNTIE PULLS THE CAT'S TAIL 285

edge of the table and the cat still holding its neck in his strong teeth, turkey, cat, and brown paper all struck the floor together.

The noise of the paper and the thud of the turkey, which landed on the cat's back, proved too much for his nerves. He fled so fast that it looked like a streak of gray fur which flew across the floor and disappeared into the bathroom.

Miss Mattie picked up the turkey amid shouts of laughter from all concerned.

"It is n't hurt a bit!" she said. "It fell right in its own paper, and kittie may have the rest of this neck! Now, where in the name of gracious shall I hide this bird so nobody can eat it, or fall over it, or sit on it, till we get back!"

"Put it on your marble-top table, and set your wash-tub over it!" said Bob. "Here! I'll fix it! Now set these flatirons on top, so Herbert can't tip it over! There you are!"

They all trooped back to their supper, laughing, talking, and eating in picnic style. Old auntie was as happy as a child to be sitting there with the others.

"Uncle Matt got the prettiest set of dishes you ever saw!" said Gracie. "And knives and forks! And spoons! And a tablecloth! And two dozen napkins! And the *cutest* little things to hold salt and pepper! Then he got — what *did* you get besides the rocking chair, Uncle Matt?"



"I really do not remember!" said Mr. McCabe. "But it seems to me that—"

"Oh, he got lots of groceries — canned things, to last them just ever so long!" cried Gracie.

Mr. McCabe looked around the table and saw the eagerness in every face except old auntie's. She alone was not to be in that most delightful of all privileges — to make those less fortunate than ourselves share our happiness — the essence of the true Christmas.

Now Matt McCabe was no philanthropist. Never before in his life had he participated in such a frolic. When Christmas or birthdays occurred. his cheque book furnished the only presents he gave. He never had known the joy of giving his time, his energy, his disinterested labor to make any one happy. And except for Miss Mattie, he would not be knowing it now. Every once in a while he felt a whimsical surprise, which almost caused him to smile, to think that he should be here, instead of amusing himself at his club, or the theatre, or at some congenial friend's. But he was conscious that this was pleasanter, more exciting, newer, than anything he had ever Certain chords in his nature which never had vibrated before were being touched. He thought he must be gathering material for a book. Perhaps his great ideal was about to be realized. He could explain in no other

OLD AUNTIE PULLS THE CAT'S TAIL 287

way the singing of his blood and the general gladness that possessed him.

He beckoned Miss Mattie aside.

"The automobile is still at the door," he said.
"Do you think it would be possible to give old auntie a ride in it? And old Mrs. Knobloch? It is a limousine, and—"

"A — what?" asked Miss Mattie.

"It's covered and as warm as toast!"

"Oh, Mr. McCabe! If you are n't one of God's little ones I've never seen any!"

The big man, six feet two, straightened himself with a startled look, and shook back his thick lock of hair. Then his eyes softened as they rested on the white face and big eyes of the tall, thin woman with her look of utter self-forgetfulness and lack of vanity. Her face was plain, yet somehow it seemed glorified.

She turned away.

"Children!" she said in an awed voice. "We've got the blessedest man in the world right here with us! What do you think he's gone and thought up now! Why, a ride through all these bright, Christmas-y streets for two old ladies, who never saw such sights in all their lives! And in that grand big flyin' machine of his! Gracie, you run up and tell the Knoblochs; there's room for all three of them, and Steenie can carry old auntie. Tell them we have n't time to do a



thing, so they'll have to wrap her up themselves and fix her with pillows and a hot brick at her feet. Then stop on your way down, and ask Mrs. Meyer if I can lay Gloria in her bed till I come back. She's so tired to-night she'll sleep through any noise. That's a good girl! Now, come on, every one of you! We've got to get all these things piled up here, into the wagon!"

The old lady, whose ears were sharper than most, had listened in breathless attention to these plans. When it was finally decided, she began to dance in her chair and pound the table with her knife and fork.

"I'm goin' to go out! I'm goin' to go out!" she shrilled. "I'm well! I ain't never goin' to go back to bed! I'm goin' to keep this chair! Joe don't need it! See! I can roll it myself! Get out o' my way, niece Galloway!"

Suiting the action to the word, she gave the table a push and the well-oiled chair slid back suddenly, bumping into Mrs. Galloway, who was clearing the table, and knocking her down. The crash of broken crockery and the anguished wail of the big, clumsy woman were ample testimonials of the ruin wrought.

The old lady twisted around and viewed her prostrate relative with ghoulish glee.

"What did I tell you?" sobbed Mrs. Galloway from the floor. She made no attempt to get up.

OLD AUNTIE PULLS THE CAT'S TAIL 289

A rivulet of ham gravy was stealing toward her right ear, but she saw it not.

Mr. McCabe, scarlet from suppressed laughter, raised her to a sitting posture just in time to keep the gravy from reaching her fat cheek. The children were choking between a wild desire to laugh and the stern politeness enforced by Miss Mattie, who eyed them, finger on lip.

Not so Mr. McCabe. He got Mrs. Galloway to a chair, and then, weak from his efforts, he gave way utterly, and everybody shouted with laughter.

Mrs. Galloway looked around plaintively,—at the half-sobbing people, at the ham, at the broken dishes,—then she too joined in.

"I'd like to know what is the matter with all of us to-night!" she sighed. "Looks to me 's if all the imps was loose. I ain't hurt! 'N' I would n't 'a' fell down if that there pesky chair had n't slid up behind me 'n' hit me right back of where my knees is at. Now, everybody leave me alone 'n' I'll red up. I hate to be helped to red up! Helpin' just bothers me!"

While they were trying to obey her, Sam Byers came in. He looked exactly as he did the day he brought Joe and Miss Mattie home in his hack. The same weathered red was in his clean-shaven face, the same jovial twinkle in his green eyes. Apparently, the same large quid of tobacco puffed out his right cheek.



"Now, then, people!" was his salutation.

They greeted him, and in concert told of their plan.

"Everything and everybody in the wagon—tree, dinner, presents, and people?" he questioned, his eyes snapping with anticipation. "Great work! It's cold as the dickens, so wrap up, everybody. Best bring along a couple o' quilts for the kids. Now then, Bob, lend a hand with the tree. After that's in, we can pack boxes and parcels in around its base. Mind the door! Steady! Ease her there! Now we're all right!"

"It's more fun," cried Gracie, dancing around, "to see everything done, and to know it's all going to be for somebody, than even the best dream I ever had! And to think dear old auntie is going too! Oh! oh!"

"Passle o' fools!" growled the old lady, watching Gracie dance. She twitched her thick black eyebrows, and made a face at the boys.



CHAPTER XVIII

In Which They All Ride in an Express Wagon

MISS MATTIE'S street was not conservative. It was radical even to liberalism, yet it gave a gasp when, on Christmas Eve, a large express wagon moved slowly down its length, evidently on service bent. Shopkeepers neglected customers to stare at its occupants, and the neighbor-women turned out in force.

When they saw who it contained they knew where it was going. And they gave a rousing cheer, reënforced by a waving of hats from the men and of aprons from the women.

Miss Mattie blushed, Mr. McCabe grinned, Mrs. Galloway and the children waved in return, and Sam Byers slapped the reins and shook the whip in mental suggestion.

They were oddly packed in. Mr. McCabe rode with the driver where, by turning sideways, he could steady the tree. Joe's chair came next. Then Miss Mattie, Bob, Gracie, and Mrs. Galloway on the bottom of the wagon, seated on such of the presents as were warranted not to smash. And all covered with quilts! Brightly pieced, thickly wadded, warm-as-toast quilts!

Matt McCabe, turning often to view his charges,



thought he never had seen so much brightness nor such happy, anticipatory faces gathered in so small a space. It was to be a *real* surprise, for they were not expected until Christmas morning even by Mrs. Eisenhut, who was partly in the secret. The surprise part of it was what seemed to get into the children's blood and cause them to twist and wriggle and laugh and giggle as if nothing so unusual, so delicious, and so different had ever before happened to anybody.

Miss Mattie said little, but she kept her eyes and ears open. She watched Mrs. Galloway, whose solemn manner of enjoying herself was a never-ending source of amusement to the lively younger woman. Once, when the wagon was blocked by traffic and they stopped alongside of a packed and jammed street car, crowded with exhausted shoppers, Miss Mattie watched the tired faces within the car light with interest and unselfish pleasure as eager eyes took in the significance of the odd load the express wagon carried, and quick imaginations leaped forward to picture its probable destination.

"Land o' love!" thought Miss Mattie. "I wonder how she can compare the two ways! I'll bet the children are havin' twice the fun to-night with this jaunt that they'll have to-morrow with their own tree!"

A quick turn from the brightly lighted street



THE RIDE IN THE EXPRESS WAGON 203

into a dark lane — then before a row of shabby houses they stopped.

There was a feeble light flickering from the window of the basement where the Eisenhuts lived.

"They're at home!" cried Miss Mattie. "And it's so early — not eight o'clock yet!—that the children will all be up."

Mr. McCabe sprang down with the agility of a boy and hurried around to the end of the wagon, which Sam had backed up to the broken wooden sidewalk. Miss Mattie was nearest. She stood up, and Mr. McCabe held out his arms.

For the fraction of a second, Miss Mattie hesitated.

"Come!" he said. "Don't jump. Let me lift you down!"

With a deep flush, which caused her to wonder at herself, Miss Mattie obeyed him and was lifted to the ground so gently and with such deference that the swift rush of her emotions made her dizzy. She fairly shook herself in her honest self-indignation as she stumbled across the walk and knocked at the basement door.

"Don't they occupy the whole house?" whispered Mr. McCabe.

"No, they live in the basement!" answered Bob in a low tone. "It's 'most four feet underground, and half the time damp. I don't see how they keep well — ever!"



Matt McCabe, his hands busy unloading the wagon, let his mind run riot. Never before had he himself gone to a scene like this. His money had done the work, while he, metaphorically speaking, lolled at ease before the fire. Now he was about to see "how the other half lives."

Knowing his own weakness and thoroughness, he made a wry face. This night's work was going to cost him something compared with which mere money would be cheap. Cheap and easy!

Inside the house a babel of excitement prevailed. He could hear a jumble of English and German. Sam Byers had rolled Joe's chair in, and now he came out grinning and rubbing the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Never see such a sight!" he laughed. "Whose idear was this here transplantin' Christmas? I'll bet a cookie it was Miss Mattie's! Say, you'd ought to hear the neighbor-women tell about her doin's with them kids o' hern! Teaches 'em herself 'n' everything! She's a wonder, she is! D' you notice what she's done for that there Joe? He ain't the same boy we took from old Sproule! Come on now, with the tree! I just want to be there to hear them kids yell!"

They yelled and no mistake, although, judging from their pale, pinched faces, one could see they were not the yelling kind. But they were led by the other children.



THE RIDE IN THE EXPRESS WAGON 295

Mrs. Eisenhut, albeit a capable body, was so stunned by the munificence of the gifts that she sat on the worn haircloth sofa, bent forward, simply watching. After clearing the table and setting the lamp on the dresser, her work was over. Her lips occasionally moved in broken exclamations of "Du lieber Himmel" or "Lieber Gott!" spoken in an awed whisper that was almost a prayer. Possibly it was wholly one.

Mr. McCabe and Bob Avery made the tree fast to its base, and opened the boxes. Gracie's quick fingers undid the parcels and Miss Mattie and Mrs. Galloway set the table with its stiff-as-a-board tablecloth which would not lie down, but stood out like a hoop skirt all around; the new napkins, which refused to fold properly, so had to be laid down like young sheets at each place; the shining new silver, which brought Mrs. Eisenhut from her sofa with a jump and made her cry for joy — Joe said he saw her kiss one of the forks! — the salts and peppers, and then the dishes!

Miss Mattie could hardly suppress a sigh of envy when she saw that set of dishes, with small rosebuds and a gilt edge on every piece, all complete and unbroken, when hers were so sadly nicked and maimed.

"Your dinner," said Miss Mattie, "is all here in this basket. It's the children's gift to you.



They've been saving their money for three months, and they bought it every bit themselves — picked out the things and paid for them! Bless their little hearts!"

"All but the turkey!" cried Joe. "That was yours!"

"Turkey!" shrieked the Eisenhut children. There were four of them — Minna, eleven, Franz, nine, Ernst, seven, and a little five-year-old who went by the name of Liebchen.

"They haf heard so much of turkey," said Mrs. Eisenhut, "but they haf never tasted him!"

"They shall to-morrer," said Mrs. Galloway firmly. "It's all stuffed 'n' just ready to set in the oven. I'll tell you how to cook it 'n' make the gravy, so's it'll be just grand!"

"Now in this big box," went on Miss Mattie, "are some more things — I don't know just what — but things to last a long time! That's more of Mr. McCabe's present!" she added in a whisper, indicating the table and the groceries.

Sam Byers was still bringing things in. His last trip was to fetch the rocking chair, with a high cushioned back where a tired head might really rest after a weary day.

The children flung themselves into it in a body. The thin, pale faces were flushed; wan eyes flashed; but their excitement was of the sort to make the heart ache. One does not congratulate



THE RIDE IN THE EXPRESS WAGON 297

the starving upon their good appetite, and the frenzy of the Eisenhuts was that of the frozen and starved, soul and body and mind, which gave Matt McCabe the most uncomfortable feeling he had ever experienced.

He tried to shake it off, when the cry came for the tree. The lamp was turned out. The room was in darkness. Then Bob began to light the candles, and the sighs and sibilant whispers which came from the eager dark bore witness to the miracle which was unfolding before his tense audience.

When the last candle was burning bravely, Bob began to hand out the presents with which the tree was laden. The lamp had to be lighted again that the names might be read and the contents revealed.

Surely there never were such presents! How could "die Engel Kinder" know with such sureness just what each small Eisenhut wanted and needed! How wonderful the stockings, shoes, and mittens were!

And the toys!

For Liebchen, Bob had found a most marvelous animal. She might have been a kid or a lamb, though either animal would have resented the implied resemblance. She was jointed, covered with white wool, and boasted the tail of a rabbit. Her ears were long, and one came forward saucily



while the other receded modestly. But her eyes! They were of green glass, but such a queer, impish green glass!

The eyes of the nondescript animal, to say nothing of her cynical smile, would have caused her to be arrested on suspicion in any righteous, God-fearing community. Her smile was made of black cotton and merely stitched on, but no world-weary member of many Manhattan clubs could approach the cynicism and you-must-show-me expression of this animal's lips. Then, when you turned all her joints backwards and twisted her head quite around, you had a transformation to make any vaudeville artist wild with envy.

The children laughed unintelligently at the creature. It took grown-ups to comprehend all its possibilities suggested.

Mrs. Eisenhut looked at it with bent brows.

"We call her 'Heidi,'" cried Gracie, "because she's so interesting!"

"'Heidi'!" repeated Mrs. Eisenhut. "Zat is ze name of my Liebchen here! And where ze real Heidi lived — zat is our home! We came from ze Alps! We know zoze people! You haf read ze book? You know Heidi?"

"I should think we did!" smiled Miss Mattie. "A lady gave it to Gracie in the hospital. And I've read it aloud to the children three or four times! And Lady Jane! And Nils! I teach



THE RIDE IN THE EXPRESS WAGON 299

them all I can, because they can't either of them go to school — at least, not quite yet."

Mrs. Eisenhut shook her head, for words failed her. She knew all about Miss Mattie, and worshiped her as a creature almost too good to be real—a thing Miss Mattie never suspected nor could have believed, if told.

Mrs. Galloway approached.

"I've hid the stockin's in the dishpan 'n' shoved it under your bed!" she whispered. "They're all filled, 'n' ready to hang up the minute the childern are asleep!"

Mrs. Eisenhut began to stammer her thanks. But Mrs. Galloway waved them aside.

"'T ain't nothin'!" she said.

"Nein! Perhaps for you it iss nossing!" said Mrs. Eisenhut. "I had presents before—not as many nor as fine as zese. No! But never had I had ze people to come and share my joy. Never has ze love—ze love of God in ze heart—come out to speak to us ze way it has to-night! I am sankful for ze gifts! Zey are splendid, fine! I sank you for zem! But for your coming yourselves—all of you—ze shildern and ze kind gentleman and you! I shall pray for you all my life for zat! It is like ze Christ! Ah, you do not know what it means to me!"

Before the homesick woman could get her tears comfortably started, Miss Mattie was wiping

them away with her own pocket handkerchief, her arm around her sister-woman's neck.

Mrs. Galloway creaked away. She was uneasy inside. She did not know even how she felt. And all the way home, with the tired, excited, happy talk going on in snatches around her, she still could not decide.

She told Mr. McCabe at parting that, yes, she'd had a good time, but just the same she felt all snarled up inside — and some pestered.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RESULT OF THE UNSELFISH CHRISTMAS

THREE times did Maggie Connor creep to the front door of Miss Mattie's shop to see if the children were quiet, and three times she had to go back to Mrs. Shapiro's with the news that the children were too excited to sleep. It was after twelve when Miss Mattie finally convinced herself that Joe had really succumbed.

Then ghostly figures bore in the tree and set it up. The stockings had already been hung, and Mrs. Shapiro and the Connors tiptoed into the back room to feast their eyes on the three bulging, misshapen articles which on this night of all the year pass muster for the shapely hose which cover pretty children's sturdy legs.

"I got an idea from you, Maggie," whispered Miss Mattie, "and that is that all people who have children's hearts like children's surprises. It came to me, all of a sudden, yesterday. So I got a stocking of old auntie's and filled it for her. And I've got a sock hanging behind the stove for Bob. Of course he's bigger than my children, and maybe he'll be mad, but I don't count on it. Then —" her voice trailed off into silence and Maggie, never suspecting that Miss Mattie was



withholding anything worth the telling or she would have dragged it out of her, let it go. But the corners of Miss Mattie's mouth twitched as she thought of a dark blue silk sock, filled with the same foolish candy and nuts and raisins and jokes that the children's held, which she had popped into the pocket of Mr. McCabe's fur-lined overcoat just before he put it on and dashed out to catch his train.

"He's got a child's heart too, though he has n't discovered it yet," she thought.

"We'll be over before breakfast," whispered Maggie. "Let 'em have their stockin's before we come, but we got to see 'em when they find the tree. Can you make 'em wait till seven o'clock, Miss Mattie?"

"Till any time you say!" answered Miss Mattie. "It's a grand idea to put it in the show window and draw the curtains. They won't think anything of my not opening up on Christmas. So take your time. Why don't you eat your breakfast, and come over about half-past eight? That would give me a chance to get a little oatmeal into my children. I know they won't eat anything unless I choke it down them, they're that excitable. I just wish you'd seen them at the Eisenhut's. Gracie nearly had hysterics."

Mrs. Shapiro's brilliant white teeth flashed into view as she smiled at the imaginary picture.

"We will-a come soon after eight!" she declared. "Miss Mattie, some-a day I tell-a you some-theeng!"

After they had gone, Miss Mattie knelt beside the crib of baby Gloria and prayed for her children as she had never prayed before. A wave of thankfulness from the great spirit of Christmas swept over her, and rendering to God the things which were God's, she wrapped her loved ones in the arms of Divine Love with a perfect confidence in its beneficent healing. Then, with a smile of ineffable peace upon her lips, she laid herself down and slept.

She expected to be wakened before dawn. But the children, worn out by the excitement of the evening before, and not expecting stockings, slept soundly. Finally it was Gloria who wakened first, and her chirpings, for all the world like a little bird in its nest, roused Miss Mattie.

"My lamb!" whispered Miss Mattie, creeping quietly to the baby's crib and hanging over it, with all the tender passion which none but childless mothers know. "My bird! My beautiful baby! Oh, so sweet!"

Gloria held up her hands to be taken and Miss Mattie gathered her into her arms with a rapture which made the baby smile. She put her little mouth against Miss Mattie's cheek and splashed a kiss there such as those who have known the

like, value beyond any others in the power of earth to bestow. It was her baby's first kiss, and no present from a monarch on his throne could have caused Miss Mattie such joy.

Gracie heard them moving about, and sat up. It was just daylight and without a word she sprang up and flew to kiss Miss Mattie and the baby.

"This is our first family Christmas, is n't it, Miss Mattie-dear? And it is baby sister's first on earth! Oh, Miss Mattie, if she could talk do you think Gloria could tell us about her other Christmases when she was with God?"

"I believe she could!" declared Miss Mattie. "Would n't it be wonderful to hear her tell what she's thinking of with her eyes fixed always on what God tells her to see!"

"Let me have her, Miss Mattie! I want to walk with her. It's so nice and warm here—why! what are these? Oh, oh! Miss Mattie! Come quick! Somebody—oh, it was you! I know it was! Joe! Look! Oh-h, Miss Mattie! Here's one for everybody! Gloria's too! How cute her little tottie looks! And one for Bob even! Joe! Joe! See, Gloria-love! Hold out your little hands! Now! Let's open your's first! Oh, Miss Mattie, see how tight she holds on to it! She knows it's Christmas! Let sister open it for you, darling! Oh, is n't she cute to hang on so tight! Why, her little fingers are just as

RESULT OF THE UNSELFISH CHRISTMAS 305

strong! Joe! Do hurry and dress! Is he coming, Miss Mattie? Joe! It's stockings! See, baby! Here is a soft yellow ball for you! And a rubber horsie! And a lovely woolly lamb with a squeak! Miss Mattie!"

The child's voice came sharply.

"What is it, darling?" came the swift reply. Gracie pointed.

Gloria had opened her eyes and there was color—a distinct dark blue color, the proper shape in the proper place, in each eye.

The two gazed in silent amazement. For the space of perhaps three moments the baby held her eyes open, apparently examining her wonderful presents. Then, with a soft sigh, her lids fluttered down and her eyes closed.

Gracie and Miss Mattie looked at each other in awe.

"That is the coming of the Christ to me this day!" whispered Miss Mattie. "That is the sign! I shall have my baby's sight, perfect, clear, beautiful, in this world! Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard my cry!"

The wonder was repeated to Joe a few moments later when he rolled his chair in. He sat with his fat stocking in his hand, looking queerly at Miss Mattie and Gracie. He seemed in no hurry to open it.

Miss Mattie divined his thought.

"Don't fret because your healing seems delayed, Joe-dear!" she comforted him. "Maybe you've got more to empty out of your mind than Gracie and Gloria have. I got such a vision of patience when I was reading where the children of Israel were kept out of the promised land for forty years — think of that! — because they were n't ready for the blessing, and because they disobeyed what they knew God had told them to do. Is there anything on your mind, son dear, that's holding you back? If there is, this Christmas Day would be a lovely time to drop it. Just turn your back on it, son dear, and start over. Your Heavenly Father's got more patience and more love than everybody else in the world put together! My land! I've let the oatmeal burn, I do believe! No, it's just scorched, but not enough to taste. Come along now, and eat your breakfast. I got cream for you to-day, because it's Christmas!"

But in spite of the surprise of the filled stockings, this Christmas breakfast was not a complete success. There was a little rift somewhere, and Miss Mattie's anxious eyes, roving to and fro, finally located it with Joe.

"There's something the matter with him — he acts as though he's got a load on his mind," she said to herself. "Well, maybe it is n't much, and if it is n't much of a load, the tree'll knock it off."

RESULT OF THE UNSELFISH CHRISTMAS 307

Gracie's suspicions were aroused when Mrs. Shapiro and the Connors came. Her eyes danced.

"There's a surprise coming! I feel it!" she cried.

Every one denied it, but when the Knoblochs and Mrs. Meyer strolled down, and Mrs. Galloway, carrying old auntie, stalked in and dumped her in Gracie's rocking chair, both children were sure. Old auntie had promised Mrs. Galloway all the way downstairs to be very good, but the moment her eyes rested on Maggie Connor she began to make faces at her, and undisciplined Maggie instantly made them back at her until Miss Mattie moved the old lady's chair.

"What do you think the surprise is?" asked Leila Knobloch.

Gracie stood quite still, and said nothing.

"What does Santy Claus always bring good childher?" demanded Mrs. Connor.

Joe looked around.

"Is it a — tree?" he hesitated.

The front door banged, and in rushed Bob Avery.

"Merry Christmas, everybody!" he cried. He carried a long white box with gilt letters on the outside.

"Here's something for Miss Mattie!" he said.

"Sure, it's flowers!" cried Maggie Connor. "Who's your beau, Miss Mattie?"

Miss Mattie's face flamed and Mrs. Galloway, glaring, trod heavily on Maggie Connor's foot, causing that young lady to emit a loud "Ouch! You fat fool!" which made the boys shout with laughter and saved the day.

"Holy Mike! American beauties!" whispered Maggie.

Miss Mattie, in a stunned silence, took up the small envelope and opened it. There was the card of Matthew McCabe, scribbled all over in fine writing, and wrapped around it was a cheque.

Miss Mattie's exclamation relieved the tension.

"The roses are from Mr. McCabe — for me!" she said in an awed tone. She touched one of them with reverent finger. "And this is a cheque to be spent, he says, in buying something nice — but listen! Here's what he wrote. 'With the inclosed, please buy something nice for each and every one of your neighbors who have contributed out of their warm hearts to the Christmas of your children, and bid them a Merry Christmas from me.' There now!"

"Good land! I wisht I may die if that ain't the nicest Christmas present anybody ever got!" said Maggie Connor.

"And worded as sweet as honey!" commented her mother.

"Eet seems to me," said Mrs. Shapiro, "that there ees sometheeng different about these-a childr' of Miss Mattie's. They give-a their blessings so queek and they-a return so queek! Have-a you notice, Mrs. Meyer?"

Mrs. Meyer nodded.

"Maggie, you fix these roses," said Miss Mattie.
"You know more about flowers than I do. Put
them in the umbrella stand. It's green, and
they'll look lovely. Now then! Let's go into
the salesroom and see what we find!"

Steenie Knobloch made a fine Santa Claus in one of Mrs. Galloway's flannelette nightgowns and a lovely red-faced mask with long white hair and beard, and the droll things he said convulsed his easily pleased audience. Old auntie was the youngest and most excitable child present. She clutched her Santa Claus stocking with eager hands, and dived into its depths with an expression of rapture on her withered face which was touching to see.

The children well knew that it was Steenie who was impersonating Santa Claus, but this fact in no way detracted from their enjoyment, for at any time they found the tall, gaunt man's dry humor amusing.

But to old auntie it was the miracle of Christmas itself. She believed it was Saint Nicholas, and her utter absorption in his antics went far toward producing the effect the neighbor-women had planned for the children.

The presents were surprises only to the recipients, for all the grown-ups had seen and discussed them before. The children were grateful too — there could be no doubt of their pleasure. They thanked the donors warmly, and seemed deeply interested in the useful and useless presents, yet every one felt a let-down of disappointment, almost intangible, but of sufficient power to cause a suspicion of artificiality where everything was expected to be spontaneous. It was as if the enthusiasm were warmed over — there seemed to be on the mental menu an item labeled "Christmas joy, réchauffée."

Mrs. Knobloch was the one to touch the hidden spring.

"Gracie, tell us! How did the Eisenhuts like their tree!"

The three children, Miss Mattie, and Mrs. Galloway galvanized into instant life. All five began talking at once, and in the babel that ensued the visitors found themselves swept along, listening with eager faces and bated breath to the composite description of what that avalanche of presents meant to a family so destitute that even these simple listeners were affluent in comparison.

"They did n't have a whole pair of shoes among 'em!" declared Mrs. Galloway, "until them there fine new ones of Mr. Knobloch's showed up."

RESULT OF THE UNSELFISH CHRISTMAS 311

"And it was too funny to see them put Grandma Knobloch's mittens right on, and keep them on all the evening, because their hands were so cold, even in the house," said Miss Mattie.

"The way Mrs. Eisenhut looked when she dove into that big box of groceries Mr. McCabe gave—" began Bob.

"Oh, when you begin on Mr. McCabe, you might jus' as well begin on Santy himself!" interrupted Mrs. Galloway. "I never before in my born days see such a thoughtful critter in a man's shape. He'd 'a' thought o' gold fillin's for their teeth if they'd so much as opened their mouths good 'n' wide!"

"In the store, when he picked out the rocking chair for Mrs. Eisenhut," began Gracie, "he put his hand to his back, as if he had a terrible pain, and he said to the man, 'Find me a chair that will rest me from my head to my heels after I've been down on my hands and knees all day scrubbing nice, easy floors!' And the man went right straight to that beauty-chair, and we all tried it."

The neighbor-women looked at each other, and dropped blessings on the absent in four languages.

"And the same way with the groceries," went on Gracie. "He picked out a fat, jolly man to wait on him, and he said 'My friend, I am about to be cast away on a desert island with a family of five. Kindly see that I do not starve, and treat

my stomach, likewise my five family stomachs, as you would treat your own!' The man laughed so hard he could hardly write down the things. Oh, it's more fun to go and buy the things, and pick them out, and then take them and see the faces and feel the joy—"

The child broke off, feeling instinctively the tactlessness of her remark.

"But of course, it is lovely to have a tree of our own and stockings and presents—" she added sweetly.

It was Maggie Connor who interrupted her. She got up, laughed, slapped her hands together, and cried out:

"I'm beat! Th' kid's p'liteness has let the cat out o' the bag! The truth is they all enj'yed last night more in this morning, and blest if I ain't more intheristed in hearing about ut meself than I am in seeing this! It's the feeling that the others—the Eisenhoots—nade the stuff, that they'd be sufferin' witout ut, that their whole lives are just work with niver a bit of fun, just always 'Down on me hands and knees all day, scrubbin' nice, easy floors!' an' doin' ut ivery day, mind ye! Not wanst a week, like some others I c'd mention that often kicks at that, even!"

She paused and dashed her hand across her eyes. "Good-by, kids!" she called out. "I'm goin'!

But I got this to tell yuh, if it'll do yuh any

RESULT OF THE UNSELFISH CHRISTMAS 313

good. I've give my last Christmas present for show! I'll get me an Eisenhoot of me own next year! Come on, Ma!"

The others rose also and walked to the door, Miss Mattie in the midst of them with an arm around Mrs. Shapiro and Mrs. Connor.

Old auntie sat hugging her presents and digging her little claw again and again into her stocking to see if by chance anything could possibly be sticking in the toe.

At the door, Maggie Connor turned around and waved her hand. Old auntie saw it, and responded by shaking her fist at all of them.

"Passle o' fools!" she cried, diving for another raisin.

CHAPTER XX

THE LETTER FROM MATT McCABE

MISS MATTIE, chin in hand, sat busily thinking. The holidays, so called, were over, and spring fashions must be met. She had noticed, in a dim sort of way, that her trade was not keeping up. Women came, to be sure, but they came to "try on," to ask questions about her "afflicted children," to look curiously at Miss Mattie herself as if she were not quite like other people, and then, perhaps, to whisper to each other and go away without buying. Her best customers now came to her only for their second-best hats, and went farther downtown for their most expensive.

What was the matter? Did people think, because she had the children to consider, that her business no longer came first in her mind? Or was she, because of her new and more important interests, falling behind the times? Or were the times changing and becoming too daring, too expressive for her slow feet? Her income was falling off more and more, and each day her expenses, no matter how carefully watched, were becoming greater. As she reviewed the situation, lines of anxiety appeared on her usually smooth white brow.

Suddenly a new thought struck her. Was she not, by these foolish fears and these human plans, limiting the power of her Heavenly Father? Was not the command, "Therefore take no thought, saying What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" imperative to all His children today? Was she not, by her sinful doubts, deliberately shutting herself off from her never-failing source of supply?

With a smile of absolute confidence that her needs were already met — whatever was necessary to keep her business up to the front rank, as well as money for her daily needs and the rent when it would be due — she turned up the light and began to study her worn Bible. "Man shall not



live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," she read. And "Thy words were formed and I did eat them," and "I sate down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste."

"The hidden manna!" whispered Miss Mattie. She rose to go about her work, as certain that her cry for help had been heard as if the cheque were already in the bank. And although many days slid by and no visible help came, not once did her sure knowledge of her unseen source of supply fail her.

One morning, some two weeks after this vigil, Gracie brought in a thick letter in a blue envelope, addressed in Mr. McCabe's virile handwriting. The mere sight of the character expressed in this man's letter, the feeling of it between her fingers, brought to Miss Mattie the sense of a friend's handclasp.

She waited until she was alone and then, trembling with an excitement she could not explain, she sat down, opened it carefully, and read:

"MY DEAR MISS MATTIE,

"You must have thought it strange, after the more than friendly Christmas Eve I had the happiness of spending with you and the children, that you have heard nothing from me for so long, Not even an acknowledgment of the mysterious

blue silk Christmas stocking, with its mate carefully rolled inside — for all the world like the Eisenhuts' gifts! — and all filled with such joyreminders of my young friends, of whom I count you chief. But, my dear friend, you will be grieved to know that my mother has passed from my sight into the great Beyond, and in her sore need of all my time I had no opportunity to write.

"Are you glad or sorry to know of a spirit's passing? You hold such strange yet irresistibly attractive views that I do not know how you regard death. To me it has always appeared as an enemy, and the submission with which pious Christians bow to its coming has always seemed not only servile but sinful. Why do we die so young, when, if any of your Bible is true, the patriarchs lived to such wonderful ages? And if death is normal, natural, and sent by your Heavenly Father, why does it say, somewhere, that your Elder Brother came to abolish death? Again, if He did, why do not His professed followers emulate His example and destroy it? He not only rose Himself, but He commanded His disciples to raise the dead. Why has that power been lost? Where did it go?

"You will say that I am distraught to write so wildly to you — almost a stranger, yet no stranger to me, nor ever was, if the truth were known. I

often feel that I knew you in another world, Miss Mattie Morningglory, and your name suits you as it could suit no other woman I have ever known. And I know you better than you think, for in describing you to my mother I found that I could tell her things I did not realize I knew about you.

"Before she was stricken, she was more interested in what you are doing for those children than in anything I have told her in years. asked hundreds of questions. Some I could My mother answer, and some I could not. was a rare soul, Miss Mattie. I wish you might have known her, and that she might have known you. Then the two best women who have ever entered my life would have clasped hands. She always wanted to do something for crippled or disabled children. All her charity — and she was ever most generous — took that form, but in her ill health she was unable to seek out individual cases or even to know where her money went. She gave it to institutions when she would have had me neglect my work to hunt up deserving cases for her. This partly accounts for the vital interest she took in you and your work.

"How lost opportunities mock us when it is too late! I would have smiled, a year ago, at the thought of seriously taking the time to humor her in this. Yet if I could have her back I would haunt the hospitals in order to select suitable

subjects for her kind offices. I was more selfish. I satisfied myself by making her daily life comfortable. When she would not leave the farm to have city conveniences, I brought city conveniences to the farm. She had a well-built house, warmed with hot-water heat. She had two bathrooms. She had electricity brought from the village — even to cook with — because service in the country is uncertain. She had a telephone. I gave up an automobile of my own that she might have one. And yet, like many a man, I did not give the woman I loved what most she desired! And the thought harrows me!

"Why do I tell this to you? Frankly, I do not know!

"I only know this. That in all the beautiful talks I had with her before her passing, I was unable to give her from my own philosophy one comforting thought. Nor was she happy in her religion. She wanted to stay. She wanted to be well. She wanted to live. And you, with your strange faith, could have comforted her. Yours is a religion of joy, of hope, of invincible, impregnable certitude! No vaporings! No blind submission to the agony of parting! Courage, O soul of mine! Whine not, ye Christians! But rather shout for joy!

"So I tried to tell her of your understanding. In thoughts which groped and words which

faltered and stumbled, I attempted to explain to her your sublime translation of hidden meanings in the Bible. With your magic key I, in my poor blind way, myself not understanding nor believing, tried to unlock the Scriptures to her and let her walk in the glorious green pastures and beside the still waters where you tread so fearlessly and with such joyful confidence that your beloved Elder Brother is holding your hand every step of the way. I told her that by your strange philosophy you were able to prove that the tabernacle of God is with men, and that you made us see that in very truth your God dwelt with you and was your God, and that He daily wiped away tears from off all faces. I know, for I have seen the tears!

"She listened, rapt and breathless. Did she understand? Did she catch a glimpse? I know not. She smiled often, but could speak little. I was by her side night and day, and if I stopped, the pressure of her weak fingers urged me to continue. I did my best. I searched my memory. I faithfully repeated every word I could remember that you had uttered in your explanation to me. I told her of baby Gloria and of Joe. And ever the faint fingers urged me on, until once, without any volition of my own — without even knowing that I had heard it or intended to say the words, I heard my voice stating with

THE LETTER FROM MATT McCABE 321

the positiveness of you yourself, 'In God's creation, there is no death!'

"She opened her eyes at that, smiled, lifted her hand until it rested on my bowed head, and so, in silent blessing of me for the assurance — she fell asleep.

"Oh, then — then is when I wished for you most, my friend! I was in agony, but no tears would come! My heart seemed breaking, yet I could not ease the pain. I longed for you to — yes, to comfort me! The child in me longed for the comfort of a woman's tender words.

"Do you think this strange, presumptuous? No; you have mothered so many other waifs you would welcome even the big blundering man whose heart cried out for something — anything that you could give. So I am not ashamed to lay bare to you in a letter thoughts too sacred for speech. A letter, such as this, torn from a heart as it grieves under a wound like mine, is like whispering to a friend, under cover of the darkness, deep and secret gropings which daylight might shame, if not actually dispel.

"But now to the immediate object of this letter. Before she lost her speech, my mother and I had a long talk, and the last desire she expressed was that I should ask you if you would accept, for yourself and the children, the amount of money she was accustomed to give to the hospitals.

She told me to say to you that it would give her pleasure to know to whom her money was going, and that she rejoiced to find that so beautiful a work as yours was being done where she could reach out her hand and help. She was so anxious to know if I thought you would allow this, that I gave her my word that you would. I said, that, from my knowledge of your creed you would regard this as one of your Answers, and that you would take the money as coming straight from your Source of supply. So I am asking you not to refuse us, for I add my entreaties to hers. And because I know that you will help me to carry out her loved wishes, I am inclosing my cheque for the amount she mentioned, and the same sum will be paid to you quarterly to be used in any manner you see fit.

"I send you my grateful thanks for — well, most of all, for being on earth to help and to hold and to encourage the falterers of this world.

"And I am proud to sign myself
"Your sincere friend for all time,
"MATTHEW McCabe"

CHAPTER XXI

BLANCHE TERRANOVA COMES BACK

NIGHT was the only time when Miss Mattie could be alone with her thoughts. Although she was happy during the day with the constant coming and going, the children's chatter, and the neighbor-women dropping in, when night came and the children were safely tucked up in Divine Love; when the sounds of the day were stilled, and the calm which comes with darkness enveloped her spirit, Miss Mattie was so happy in her sense of safety and protection that she talked aloud to herself about it, and often tears of genuine happiness flowed silently down her cheeks.

An uplift, such as she never before had imagined, had been hers since the receipt of Mr. McCabe's letter. She spoke of it to no human soul, but the glory of it was never out of her mind by day or by night.

The children often looked wonderingly at her. She knew what they were thinking. They were groping for a reason for her secret joy — a joy which caused her soul to float — even her feet seemed winged, so great were her gratitude and rejoicing.

She spent the hours in reading and study; not only study of her Bible, but of other books which

threw light upon it and unlocked the hidden meaning of those Scriptures which once had meant so little to her, but now were made vital, vivid, clear by means of her new-found understanding.

Not only these did she study, but faithfully, and with infinite pains, did she go over the lessons in arithmetic, spelling, and geography she taught the children. They might suspect that she was not an adept, but not once should they find that she did not know what she taught!

One night, while thus engaged, she suddenly became aware of an alien presence in the room. Stealthy noises came from the area window, behind the heavy curtains. Miss Mattie could never look at those curtains without recalling the dreadful night when Larry had used them for his defense, and a dozen times she had planned to take them down, just to destroy their cruel association. Now she stared at them, her body growing cold and her hair rising. Transparent curtains would show what was happening behind them! She sat rigid, unable to move or to cry out.

Then a voice said: "Don't be scared, Miss Mattie. It's only me — Blanche Terranova!" And at these words, the girl showed herself.

Miss Mattie tried to rise, to speak, but could not. Terror had so gripped her that she sat as if paralyzed. She made a hoarse sound in her throat, but no words came.

BLANCHE TERRANOVA COMES BACK 325

Rendered uneasy by Miss Mattie's strange silence, the girl crept forward warily.

"It's only me! Don't be afraid!" she said again. The girl's voice, low, almost guttural, yet rich and vibrant with the love of love, brought everything back — everything that had happened the one time Blanche had been in this room, and before that — recollections Miss Mattie had thought were dead, but which rose out of their graves and tore at her heart like live things, and gripped and gnawed and ate into it anew.

Realizing that Miss Mattie would not arouse the neighbors by screaming, Blanche advanced farther into the room, gaining courage at each step. The figure by the table sat so still, she felt no fear. She paused, and eyed the older woman with a look in which curiosity, scorn, hate, and suspicion were mingled. After this insolent, all-enveloping stare, which seemed to inventory Miss Mattie's defects, the bold, black eyes of the girl roved around the simple room, where every available inch of space was made to contribute to the problem of a family's daily needs, then her eyes came back to Miss Mattie's face, and she smiled. It was a smile of hate and malice and such pagan uncontrol that ordinarily Miss Mattie would have shivered with fear.

As it was, she drew her breath sharply. Then her fingers fumbled with the leaves of her Bible,

and strength came. In her simple soul there had never been room for hate, or suspicion, or distrust of her kind. Love and compassion had always filled her heart to overflowing. Therefore her world pitied her and knew her not. But now this habit of thought bore fruit.

Thus fortified, she forgot that Blanche was the embodiment of youth and beauty and physical allurement which had robbed her of all her life once held dear and had been the means of casting her, rudderless, adrift on a stormy sea, perhaps to drown — who cared? She saw instead a sisterwoman who needed what Miss Mattie, in her simplicity and compassion, could give.

"You look tired, Blanche," were the first words she spoke. "Sit down, won't you? Take this rocking chair!"

A look of incredulity overspread the girl's face. But she accepted the proffered hospitality, and dropped into the chair with a sigh of weariness. Hers was a nature which reveled in creature comforts of every sort.

"I am tired!" she said. "But I did n't expect you to notice it. You've got no call to love me! Nor I, you!"

Miss Mattie made no reply.

"I've — I've been away," said Blanche, with a trace of awkwardness. "I've been in Chicago, till about a month ago." "Did you come here to tell me that?" asked Miss Mattie.

"No, I did n't!" said Blanche, sitting up. "I came to ask you some questions. Will you answer me — straight?"

"Yes — if I can," said Miss Mattie.

"Well!" Blanche paused, and moistened her lips. "It is n't a very nice beginning! Guess I'd better plunge right in and get it over! Did you miss your purse about three weeks ago? Did somebody steal it in the elevated one evening, about six o'clock?"

"Yes," said Miss Mattie. "I saw you; I knew you took it. What did you do it for? You must have known you would n't get money from me, since I've had these children to take care of! What made you do such a thing?"

While Miss Mattie was speaking, Blanche's face was a study. Totally unaccustomed to concealing her feelings — a pagan in love and in hate, she allowed emotions to leap forth in her countenance with savage nakedness.

"Did n't you ever hate anybody so you wanted to hurt 'em the worst way you could?" demanded Blanche, leaning forward in her chair. "Did n't you?"

"No," said Miss Mattie, honestly. "I never did — never in my life."

"Then you are no good!" declared Blanche.

"I'm that kind of a hater. I can hate people so hard it 'most makes me sick-a-bed."

She looked triumphantly at Miss Mattie, as if she had scored a victory over her. But Miss Mattie only smiled.

"That's what hate always does to you," she said gently. "It does n't hurt the other person half so bad. You're the one that gets it! Did n't you ever notice that?"

Blanche, unaccustomed to think, looked bewildered a moment.

"See now, your hating me never harmed me a bit. I'm protected by Divine Love," said Miss Mattie.

She glanced toward the door leading to the salesroom without noticing that it was slightly ajar.

"I want to ask you something now," said Miss Mattie, confidentially. "Why did you come in here another night and hide my fifty dollars in Joe's screen, so I would suspect a little innocent fellow who never did a mean thing in his life?"

Blanche's puzzled face finally broke into a smile.

"Is that the line of talk you hand out about that Joe!" she exclaimed. She brought her fist down into the palm of her other hand. "Gee! But that's rich! I never was in this room but once before in my life, and you know when that was! That's the truth, so help me!"

She broke off to laugh.

"So you found money in Joe's screen, and he told you that he never put it there, and you believed him! You believed that Joe! Why, don't you know where he came from?"

"Yes, I know he came from a den of evil. I took him out of the clutches of a monster who had scared him into helplessness — there is n't a thing the matter with Joe but just fear! And I put him into the arms of Divine Love, where he's safe!" cried Miss Mattie. "You can't make me believe those honest eyes of his could give me so straight a look, and he speak the sweet comforting words he did, when I talked to him, and yet be lying to me! No! I'll never believe it! I trust that boy!"

There were soft sounds in the salesroom that Miss Mattie did not hear. Blanche held up her hand.

"What's that?"

Both women listened, but no further sound came.

"That fifty dollars — to lose it, I mean, would n't be anything compared to losing my trust in Joe."

Blanche laughed.

"Well, you don't know me very well, if you think I'd sidestep fifty to throw suspicion on anybody! I'd 'a' got away with it, you bet!

I might 'a' risked fifty cents, but fifty dollars? Guess again, Miss Mattie!"

Miss Mattie sighed, and dropped the subject. Her faith in Joe was no whit disturbed by Blanche's denial. Joe's honest eyes and tears and apparently frank gratitude had done their work too thoroughly. It was Miss Mattie's habit to believe, and if she believed to her hurt she alone paid the penalty.

And Blanche cared so little she attempted no further argument. With a shrug, she leaned back. But her eyes roved. Presently she said:

"There was n't any money in your purse—just as you say, but—'course it sounds kind of crazy to think of such a thing, but—whose hair was that in the little envelope? I know I'm being ridiculous, but it looked—the color, I mean—"

"When did you go to Chicago?" asked Miss Mattie suddenly.

Blanche looked everywhere but into Miss Mattie's face.

- "I—it was—I don't remember exactly!" she stammered.
- "Was n't it about four months ago?" asked Miss Mattie.

The girl nodded.

"About that time," she admitted.

There was a short silence. Then:

"Did you go alone?" came in a low tone from Miss Mattie.

Blanche shook her head. But her face crimsoned.

"Maybe you won't tell me what I came to find out!" she said slowly. "I did n't know I cared so much — I did n't know I cared at all, until I saw something that reminded me of —"

She broke off helplessly.

"Of the baby you hid in my ash can and left to die!" whispered Miss Mattie.

"No!" screamed Blanche, with sudden fury. "It was dead when I put it there! I am not quite so mean as that!"

Miss Mattie drew a long breath.

"I'm glad to hear you say so!" she said. "I've hated to think all this time —" she stopped cautiously. Then, "What made you choose such an awful place to put — his child?" she whispered.

"'Cause I hate him! And I hate you!" growled the girl in her guttural voice. She clenched her hands and scowled. "I hoped when they found it somebody would be fool enough to think it was yours, and you'd be disgraced! That's what I did it for!"

Miss Mattie started, and her cheeks blazed with shame. Then she smiled — a patient, compassionate smile, which made Blanche stir uneasily in her chair.



"What makes you hate me?" asked Miss Mattie. "I never did anything to you! I never even saw you but once!"

"Gawd, woman! Have n't you any imagination?" shrilled the girl. "Have n't you ever thought over that night and put yourself in my place? Hate you? I could kill you this minute! And I could 'a' killed you every time I 've thought of you since the first time I saw your old red head and your ugly white face! Gee! To think of what your poor looking-glass has to stand every time you look into it!"

Miss Mattie shook her head.

"I can't see yet what I've done to you!" she said.

Blanche jumped forward in her chair and gripped the arms of it.

"What did you do to me? Well, if you don't know, I'll teil you! You would n't give me the money when I asked you for it, so Larry had to come himself, and that's how he got pinched. Then I had to let him go, and I was sick, all alone, without him—and then the baby turned out to be such a horrible object. I blame every one of those things on to you. Even the baby might 'a' been all right if so much had n't happened to me! And it was all your fault. If me and Larry could 'a' gotaway together, we'd have been happy. He'd 'a' married me! Married me, I tell you!"

BLANCHE TERRANOVA COMES BACK 333

Miss Mattie rose to her feet with a cry, wrung from her jealous heart at the thought of these two lovers and herself left out — always left out!

"What's the matter?" asked Blanche curiously.
Miss Mattie shook her head.

"Nothing!" she said. She pressed her hands to her throbbing temples and struggled for selfcontrol. On the opposite wall was a small gilt frame which held this sentence:

"CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THIS HOUSE,
THE UNSEEN HOST AT EVERY MEAL,
THE SILENT LISTENER TO EVERY CONVERSATION."

Miss Mattie's feverish eyes ran quickly over the gilt letters, and she straightened herself.

"Blanche," she said, "your baby was n't dead when you put it there! It was alive and crying when we found it!"

The girl gave a sharp scream.

"It is n't alive, is it?" she shrilled. "You never kept such an awful thing alive, did you? Why, even I am not as mean as that! I tried awful hard to get courage to kill it, for its own sake, because to let it live would be so cruel!"

"She's alive and well—all but her eyes!" said Miss Mattie.

"Well? Did you say well?"

"Her skin is like satin!" declared Miss Mattie.

"The doctor said she could n't get well!" cried Blanche.

"She's well now!" said Miss Mattie. "Her skin cleared up in a few weeks! And I've had the joy of her ever since! Did n't you know that was her hair you found in my purse?"

"I thought it was," murmured the girl, "but I thought she was dead. I thought you'd cut it off maybe, and kept it—" She gulped down a sob. "Anyway," she added, "I wanted to know what became of her—her body! Sometimes I dream she never was buried at all—just dumped out, you know, like—"

"She never was buried," said Miss Mattie, smiling, "because she is n't dead. Come on over here and see her."

But the girl held back. Her momentary emotion was over. To be sure, she did have occasional bad dreams about the baby, when she had eaten unwisely, but ordinarily she lived through the days without giving a thought to the subject.

She had been impelled to come there that night by mixed motives. She wanted to frighten Miss Mattie. She was curious to see her again, and she had been away so long she wanted to hear how things had been going in her absence.

When Miss Mattie suggested her seeing her baby she at once suspected that she would be asked to take it again. And to have a child to support was the last thing in the world Blanche Terranova — fille de joie — wanted.

Miss Mattie, on the other hand, was reluctant to show Gloria to her mother, fearing that the baby's wonderful beauty would so entice the susceptible girl that Miss Mattie would lose her smallest lamb.

So both women hesitated. They sat looking at one another, each trying to fathom the other's mind. Miss Mattie was reaching out after her promises and their sure answers.

"And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children!" she murmured.

"What say?" asked Blanche.

Miss Mattie rose.

"Come and see your baby," she said gently. She folded back the screen, and the light from the gas jet fell clearly on the little face of the sleeping child. No need, alas! to fear the light would waken her. Her placid breathing was undisturbed.

Both women held their breath at the sight of her transcendent loveliness. Blanche looked in stunned amazement from the baby to Miss Mattie.

"What did this?" she whispered. "I never saw anything like it."

"Prayer!" said Miss Mattie. "Just praying, literally without ceasing. There is n't a minute of the day, Blanche, that I am not declaring the





power of her Heavenly Father, and expecting her to open her eyes and see as clearly as you or I."

"But she did n't have any eyes!" whispered Blanche.

"She has them now!" affirmed Miss Mattie. "They're going to be dark blue, just like —"

"Don't you dare mention his name to me!" cried the girl. "I hate the very sound of it!"

"Seems to me you hate lots of people," said Miss Mattie. "Do you hate your baby, too?"

"She's not my baby any more," said Blanche gloomily. "Don't you try to shift her off on me to slave for and support. You took her. Now you've got to keep her. I don't want her!"

"I'll keep her for you — awhile!" said Miss Mattie; then she turned her head away, ashamed of even that much diplomacy.

"You've got to keep her for always, do you hear?" cried the girl. "I got all I can do to keep soul and body together, and if you stick her back on to me, I'll put her into a blind asylum."

Miss Mattie was so repelled by the girl's venom that she searched for some vulnerable spot at which she could be reached. Blanche looked weak and weary, in spite of her high color.

"How old are you, child?" said Miss Mattie suddenly.

"Me?" asked the girl. "I'll be eighteen next month."

BLANCHE TERRANOVA COMES BACK 337

"You'll be what?" cried Miss Mattie. "Only eighteen? Why, you are a child—a mere baby yourself. And to think of all you've been through. You poor lamb!" And in her tone was infinite compassion.

Blanche stared at her in amazement. Then she laughed, but while the laugh was still echoing through the silent room she buried her face in her hands and sank, sobbing, into a chair.

In a moment Miss Mattie was kneeling at the girl's side, holding one of her hands and patting her shoulder.

"I was only sixteen when I met him, Miss Mattie," she sobbed, "and he was the first. I swear it. He likes 'em young. He'd been going with a girl just turned fifteen when we got acquainted. She was pretty and I was proud of cutting her out. She looked older then than I do now. But he's crazy over the real young and inexperienced. Oh, I'm glad they've got him behind bars where he can't get at girls to dazzle them with a line of talk they never heard before in all their lives! He's an awful liar, yet one thing is true. His father was a preacher — he lived 'way out West, and Larry got his gift of gab straight. Gawd! How he could hand out the flattery and the love talk! No novel that I ever read could touch him! Seems as if he just gave one look into a woman's eyes and knew what she wanted. Then he gave it to her. He loved every one of them differently. Why — oh, what's the matter? What have I said? You've been so good to me, I did n't mean to make you cry."

"I know you did n't!" said Miss Mattie, making a valiant effort to control herself. But her sobbing, dry and painful, continued.

"What is it?" asked the girl. She drew Miss Mattie's head to her shoulder and clasped the thin figure of the milliner in both arms.

"I am not as mean as I let on!" Blanche murmured. "It's loving Larry makes me talk that way. I loved him so, I don't seem to get over it. To love a feller like Larry is n't like lovin' other men. You can't forget him. He still keeps his hold on you, even from his prison. Seems like sometimes I'd give up everything on earth I got, and crawl on my knees from here to Ossining, just to see him once!"

"I know!" whispered Miss Mattie. "I know!" Blanche drew away from her, and looked down into Miss Mattie's white, tear-stained face. The girl's eyes widened.

"It can't be—" she gasped. "You don't mean that you—"

Miss Mattie nodded. There was a brief pause of sheer astonishment on the girl's part, a moment of piecing things together in her mind, of

recollecting that a long time ago—on that dreadful night of Larry's capture and her own agony, there had been a thought, ridiculous enough to excite her laughter even in the midst of her danger, that this faded old woman, as Miss Mattie seemed to her then, had actually been another of Larry's conquests—a thought speedily forgotten in the tragic rush of events which followed. But now, the quick sympathies of this child of nature were touched, and she drew Miss Mattie into her arms again.

For just a moment the older women accepted Blanche's caresses, then she again struggled for her lost self-control.

"You're good not to make fun of me," whispered Miss Mattie, forlornly. "It must look ridiculous to a girl as young and pretty as you that a homely old maid could be taken in by a handsome young fellow like Larry. But he talked to me just as you said. Seems as if he only gave me one look and found out that I was famishing for affection—for the right to make a fool of myself over a man! That's all I ever asked! Just the right to make a perfect fool of myself over a husband!"

"I know!" Blanche. "I used to feel that way myself, but I got over it. Men ain't worth it, Miss Mattie. Don't you know that?"

"I don't know a thing about men," answered

Miss Mattie humbly. "Men never liked me. Nobody ever made love to me but just Larry. And I'd starved for affection so long I just could n't help believing what he said."

Miss Mattie paused a moment, thinking. Then she said:

"And even if I had known that all he was doing it for was just to get money out of me, I don't believe I could have helped it, even then! I used to think I had some pride, but Larry had a way of making me forget everything in the world but just him! You talk about suffering! Child, I don't believe the young know how to suffer, or how to love. I don't believe any woman knows how to love until she thinks she's lost her chance! Then it comes to her, lying awake nights — what love means! And then is when her heart breaks and she dies her real death — the other kind of death does n't much matter, after she's suffered like that!"

Blanche listened to the hoarse, anguished voice of Miss Mattie in astonished awe. Never had she heard such passion and such agony described. It dwarfed her own feeling into insignificance. In her secret heart she knew that images of other men had supplanted Larry many times since she parted from him. Her description of how she had loved him was drawn from her mainly by association of ideas. The room, Miss Mattie, the

sight of his baby — all conspired to move her to regret the attractive personality of her handsome lover. But in the deep-seated grief of the older woman Blanche, to whom love with its phenomena was the one subject on earth in which she was learned, detected a passion for loving an abstract ideal — the husband every woman dreams of at some time or other — but in the case of Miss Mattie the ideal husband raised to the nth power — which Blanche could never even approximate.

Well she knew that few indeed were the men who would be worthy of such worship as Miss Mattie could bestow; still, the girl was wise enough to realize that similar reaching out for one's mate — for the mere opportunity to pour out the riches of a repressed nature — probably existed in certain men also — men whose affections had been starved or mocked or wrecked. It stirred the girl's imagination and roused her sympathy to realize that in all probability these unmarried husbands and wives would miss each other, would never meet, and would go, either mismated or alone, to their graves.

"I wish I could do something for you!" said Blanche, earnestly. She drew a long breath.

"For me?" questioned Miss Mattie in surprise. "Nobody ever does anything for me, and I guess it's just as well, for if they did, I'd be so grateful, I'd scare them off from ever doing anything

more!—But you're kind to think of it. I knew you had a good heart!"

"Me kind? Me with a good heart?" cried Blanche with a hard laugh. "You certainly are a discoverer, Miss Mattie! A minute ago I was hating you so it 'most cankered the roof of my mouth, and calling you the meanest names I could think of. Now you're retaliating by telling me I'm good-hearted! Yes, I am! I'm a devil, that's what I am, Miss Mattie."

"I don't think so," answered the older woman. "Just as soon as you got the hate out of your system, the devil disappeared. You don't hate me, and you know it. Do you?"

Blanche looked down.

"No," she said, "that's the funny part of it! I really don't. But when I came in here, I did! Don't make any mistake about that!" And the snapping black eyes bore witness.

Miss Mattie rose from her knees and threw herself into a chair, with a sigh of exhaustion and weariness.

"You don't look well, Miss Mattie," said the girl.

"Well, I guess I don't — after such a spell of self-pity and the sin of crying and moaning, when I've got such a lot to be thankful for! I don't think crying improves any woman, let alone a redheaded one that's inclined to a

general pinkness all over, like me! I'm a sight when I've cried, and I know it!"

"You can't put me off like that," declared Blanche. "You are nothing but skin and bones. What have you been doin' to yourself?"

"Nothing," said Miss Mattie.

"Do you get out enough? Do you ever go to the theatre, or amuse yourself in any way, as you used to? Do you ever go on little trips to the country, or have any fun at all?"

Miss Mattie smiled, and shook her head.

"No; I don't do any of those things. I had to face giving them all up when I took the children. I live here in these two rooms all the time, and I'm happy and well. I have n't had such a spell since the first night I got home from the hospital, and I'm telling you right here I'm going to work on myself so that I'll never have another!"

There was a short silence between them.

"Say, Miss Mattie," said Blanche awkwardly, "It ain't right for you to have all the expense of the baby, when I'm her mother and got plenty. I—I lied when I said I could n't afford to take her. That ain't the truth. I just don't want her! She'd be in my way. I've got to have pleasure and run around. I'd die if I was cooped up like this. But it's only fair to let me pay some on the baby. Will you let me? Then you could go out more!"

For a few moments Miss Mattie's thoughts raced. She found herself in a serious dilemma. She wanted to do something to lift Blanche out of her present life, and she had been praying that a way would be made clear. But this?

A bright blush stained Miss Mattie's cheeks. Blanche saw it and sprang to her feet, shaking with fury.

"You won't take money from me, earned—" she broke off helplessly, and looked toward the screen which sheltered the baby's crib. Then she buried her face in her hands.

"I don't blame you!" she whispered. "I — I never thought of it that way before!"

Miss Mattie said nothing.

Blanche paced up and down the room, gnawing her lips, twisting her hands together, shamed, angry, rebellious, yet softened.

"I know what you're thinking!" she raged.
"You want me to quit, for the sake of the baby, and — take a job! A nice mess I'd be in a department store, selling corsets or union-suits! I'd rather jump off a ferry boat and be done with it."

Still Miss Mattie said nothing.

Blanche stopped in her panther-like walk and stood looking from Miss Mattie to the baby's crib.

"I must do something!" she declared. "I

can't leave things as they are. You've got me all hesitated up! I don't know what I want to do!"

"Think it over," said Miss Mattie. "You'll be wanting to see the baby again, and I'll be glad to see you at any time."

The girl listened as if unable to believe her ears.

"You'll — you'll let me come again — here — to call on you — in the daytime?" she stammered.

"Certainly I will!" said Miss Mattie simply. "Why not?"

"There's a heap of reasons why not!" said Blanche. "But I tell you one thing. I'll never forget that you asked me."

Again she held up her hand, and both women listened.

"I thought I heard somebody moving, in there!" said the girl pointing to the salesroom. "Maybe I did n't! I guess I've got the jumps to-night. But I've got something to think over. You can bet on that!"

Without a word of good-by or a backward glance, Blanche disappeared behind the heavy curtains and let herself out as noiselessly as a shadow.

Miss Mattie crept wearily to bed, not to sleep but to think half the night through with unfailing tenderness of this one lamb, strayed so far from the flock, yet not so far that Divine Love could not reach out its protecting arm and gather the lost one in.

CHAPTER XXII

JOE CAMPBELL DISAPPEARS

BEFORE Miss Mattie had fairly opened her eyes the next morning, a sense of impending disaster assailed her.

Hastily she glanced at Gracie and Gloria. They were sleeping peacefully. Then, as her thoughts flew to her other child, she knew, without looking further, that it was Joe whose call had reached her in her sleep.

She thrust her arms into the loose sleeves of her kimono and her slippered feet stole silently toward the salesroom. Just then she paused, for the door, usually latched, was ajar an inch.

Miss Mattie pushed it open and entered. There was no one to answer her quiet call. Joe's bed had been slept in, but was empty. The big front door was unlocked; the wheeled chair, too, was gone.

Although he had never before ventured into the dark streets before daylight, usually Miss Mattie would have thought that some boyish errand had called him, but in the last few months this woman had gone so far in her reaching out after Truth that she perceived events without realizing how her knowledge was attained. She had surrendered

herself so completely to the Divine Will, when once she had made the great discovery concerning what this misunderstood Divine Will represented in human affairs, that she voiced no will of her own, but let the Light lead her whither it would.

"He's gone," she whispered to the soft, enveloping dark, "and he's in trouble! He needs me! He needs help worse to-day than he ever did in his whole life! Heavenly Father, send the help the poor child is crying out for, in his dumb, frightened way! Send it in Thy way! Not mine nor his but just in Thy way! I know that Divine Love is with him, every minute, because it's everywhere! There is n't a place so dark and scary that is n't full of Thy light! There is n't room for anything but Thy goodness, which keeps moving and acting and hunting out places where it's needed, and it goes wherever the heart is empty and ready to receive it! And if there is nothing but Thy goodness in the world, how can there be any room for the things we're so afraid of! How can I be standing here, crying, with tears actually running down my face, because my boy's lost to me, when God's found him and is smiling on him, and when his Elder Brother's got him fast by the hand! Don't let go of that little hand, Elder Brother! Because it's a sad little hand, and maybe it's not — not quite as pure and clean of wrong as it should be! But

You don't see its sin, Elder Brother! To You it's just as white and innocent as Gloria's! You did n't blame even Mary, and — and I won't, either! I'll see even the Marys that are sorry and want to quit — I'll see them as You did! And I'll see Joe that way! So he's safe! He's found! He has never been lost to God! I won't worry! I'll trust! I'll believe! I'll know! Now I'll go get the children's breakfast! Deary me! But I do feel better since I've had this talk with my Father! He certainly has sent His Comforter to me this day! And I'll show my gratitude! See if I don't!"

True to her word, Miss Mattie waked Gracie and prepared breakfast. Gracie's sympathetic nature felt that uncertain something in the mental atmosphere which unusual children feel, and she kept glancing uneasily at Miss Mattie, who recognized the child's anxiety but paid no outward heed to it. Presently the forced smile left Miss Mattie's lips and a real tranquillity took its place. Simultaneously, Gracie's mind turned naturally to the usual subjects, so that when it was time to call Joe to breakfast, and Miss Mattie said casually, "Joe's gone out, Gracie. He'll be back after a while," the child did not even remark upon the unusual occurrence, but ate her breakfast with Gloria, and the ordinary happy chatter of the little girl was Miss Mattie's answer.

"Joe did n't have time to make his bed, Gracie," said Miss Mattie a little later. "You run and make it, while I wash the dishes, then you take Gloria out in her go-cart. I've a lot of work to do to-day, and I must fly!"

With the children safely out of the way, Miss Mattie could think. She searched her memory of past events for a clew to Joe's going, for Blanche's scoffing distrust of him had lodged in her mind, despite her loyalty to Joe.

Suddenly it came to her that Joe must have overheard Blanche! The door had not latched when she closed it, and the voicing of her stubborn belief in him, when he was — Miss Mattie sobbed as the thought of Joe's transgression forced itself in upon her. Every word he had spoken when she had tacitly accused him of taking her money returned to her mind and tried to sting her, but her prayer in the early dawn had done its healing work. She felt a sense of aloofness from the pain, even as her tears flowed. It seemed as if the tears came in response to the body's call, while the mind sat serenely enthroned above the tumult, knowing that tears can neither harm nor heal.

A smile of conscious calm wreathed Miss Mattie's lips, albeit her face was pale and her eyes full of unshed tears. A seer would have realized that the calm marked the supremacy of spirit, and that her face was transfigured.

She no longer wondered where Joe was. In her mind he was wrapped in Divine Love, and safe.

But when she was seated quietly sewing by the window, a thought came with the mental clearness of a voice speaking.

"Send for Mr. McCabe!"

Miss Mattie looked startled. She would obey, of course. It was a command; it was her Answer. She rose instantly, and started toward her desk to write to him. No, a note would take too long. Besides — the quick red stained her cheek—she did not know how to write a note which would please the fastidious man. She must telephone.

She went into the salesroom and took down the receiver. Twice before she had telephoned to thank him for letters. She wondered if he knew why she had not written. The color coming and going in her face, and her quick breathing, betrayed her agitation. She had not seen Mr. McCabe since she had received that marvelous letter, which had made life over for her. Still, his absence meant nothing to Miss Mattie. In her loyalty, she never questioned the acts or thoughts of a friend.

She gave the number of the Star, and on receiving it she asked for Mr. McCabe before she realized that she had not thought what to say. Should she ask him to come to see her that evening or—

Then the sound of his deep voice was in her ear, thrilling her, as the voice of a friend on whom a woman may safely lean has power to do, and with no volition of her own Miss Mattie heard herself saying:

"Oh, Mr. McCabe! This is Mattie Morning-glory. Joe's gone!"

There was a moment of breathless silence at the other end of the line. Then, with a gentleness Miss Mattie would not have believed possible, she heard the voice say:

"I will find him for you. Do not worry, dear friend. I will start immediately, and let you know the moment I find him. He is not lost. I think I know where to look."

"You do!" exclaimed Miss Mattie, seizing the stem of the telephone and smiling into the transmitter as if it were a human face. "Oh, what a comfort you are, Mr. McCabe. I feel as if I had my boy back again already. You've just put heart into me. Oh, are n't men splendid! But there, I'm keeping you! Thank you, so much! What did you say? I will! Good-by!"

She stood up, smiling happily.

"Now then," she said to herself, "all I've got to do is to keep still and he'll be back before anybody's had a chance to miss him. He's already forgiven, if he only knew it, and Gracie

need n't ever know he went. But land sakes!" she added. "What'll I tell Mrs. Galloway!"

The thought troubled her at intervals all the morning, but Mrs. Galloway did not appear until after lunch. She had no more than entered when a messenger arrived with a note. Miss Mattie smiled, even before she opened it. She knew it contained good news.

"Who's it from?" asked Mrs. Galloway, with frank neighborliness.

"From Mr. McCabe," said Miss Mattie, carelessly stabbing her hair with a crochet needle. "He says he's got Joe with him in his rooms and he wants to know if he can't stay a couple of days!"

Miss Mattie suppressed a yawn with the back of her hand.

Mrs. Galloway's jaw dropped in candid astonishment.

"Well, for the land o' love!" she exclaimed. "How'd he get a-holt o' Joe at this time o' day?"

"Oh," said Miss Mattie, "I reckon he just ran across him somewhere, and invited him. That would be Mr. McCabe, you know."

"Well, upon my word!" was all Mrs. Galloway could say.

Miss Mattie made no reply.

"You goin' to let him stay?" asked Mrs. Galloway.

"I've always told you the society of a good, kind, moral man was fine for children who never see anybody but us women. I'm glad Mr. McCabe's invited him. It'll do Joe lots of good!"

"You're queer, Miss Mattie," observed Mrs. Galloway.

"So you've said before!" answered Miss Mattie crisply. "I don't seem a bit queer to myself, but as everybody except just my three children says I'm queer, I guess maybe it's true. Only—I'm glad the children don't think so!"

"Oh, you ain't so queer's to be unpleasant," Mrs. Galloway hastened to say. "I'm gettin' so's I don't mind it myself. And old auntie just loves you since you've takin' to settin' with her a spell afternoons 'n' readin' to her. That reminds me, I come down a-purpose to tell you that she kin dress herself now, and this mornin' she tried makin' her bed. It was most too much for her, but she's got so much ginger 'n' vinegar in her disposition, she'll fetch it yet! It's wonderful to see a bedrid old woman near eighty come along like that. I never knew before how strong her will power was."

Miss Mattie smiled.

"I'm glad she's better," she said. "Is she still taking the doctor's medicine?"

"No, she ain't takin' a thing. She says she

threw it away, but I don't b'lieve she done that. I don't b'lieve she'd waste a whole dollar bottle of stummick bitters. I think she's hid it, or maybe she's took it all up. She keeps sayin' that she's well, and she's gettin' reel nice 'n' interestin' to have around. I sh'd think the doctor'd be kinda proud of that tonic. I never expected it to do her a mite o' good. I just bought it 'n' give it to her 'cause I thought it was my dooty to do somethin' for her 'n' have a doctor so's the neighbors could n't talk 'n' say I was neglectin' her. But I did n't have a mite o' faith in it."

"I thought you said she was n't taking his medicine," said Miss Mattie with twinkling eyes.

"She ain't — now," answered Mrs. Galloway, solemnly; "but I lay it to the twelve bottles she took before Christmas. You seen yourself how spry she was Christmas Eve."

"Yes," said Miss Mattie. "I remember. Well, as I said, I'm glad she's getting better."

"Well, I come to tell you that medicine makes cures just the same as prayin' does," said Mrs. Galloway. "You're too sensible a woman to begrudge that feelin' to me, 'cause you know I got conshenshus scruples against the blasphemiousness of your way o' thinkin' that don't in no way reflect on my opinion o' you as a neighbor 'n' a friend. In some ways, I got a lot o' respeck for you, Miss Mattie!"

"Thank you, neighbor!" answered Miss Mattie.

"Now, if you want to go up 'n' read the Bible to ol' auntie I'll tend shop for you, 'n' red up a little. 'N' when Gracie brings Gloria in, I'll let you know."

"Thank you, neighbor," said Miss Mattie again, and then, to Mrs. Galloway's intense surprise, Miss Mattie put her arms around Mrs. Galloway's stout neck and kissed her on the cheek.

"I think the names Gracie uses just fit you, Mrs. Galloway-sweet!" murmured Miss Mattie.

"Land sakes!" cried Mrs. Galloway, her large cheeks burning with embarrassment.

She watched Miss Mattie's tall, thin figure out of sight. Then she sighed, shook her head, and dipping the mop in a pail of water, began to clean the floor, often stopping to feel of her kissed cheek, to sigh, or to shake her head, as if the puzzle of what made Miss Mattie so wonderfully "different" was a subject she never expected to comprehend.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PICTURE COMES DOWN FROM THE WALL

"THERE is no need," observed Mr. McCabe, as he sealed the note which gave Miss Mattie so much satisfaction to receive, "for this dear woman ever to know just how I found you, Joe."

"She was worried, was n't she?" asked the boy.

"I suppose she was — naturally."

Joe fidgeted, lying on Mr. McCabe's soft spring couch.

"Then why don't you telephone? It would be quicker. I—I hate to think of her worryin'!"

"She could ask questions over the telephone," said Mr. McCabe, "which I might find difficult to answer—being a painfully truthful man. She can't ask questions of a note. It would n't answer them if she did!"

Joe smiled reluctantly at the pleasantry. He was palpably frightened and ill at ease.

Matt McCabe watched him out of the corner of his eye. He rang for a messenger, and dispatched the note.

"Come, lad," he said suddenly, "honest confession is good for the soul. Your complaint

is a sick mind instead of a sick body, or, as Miss Mattie would say, your sick body is the result of your sick mind! Don't you want to tell your Uncle Matt all about it? Put half your trouble over on me and let's bear it together! Come! How did old Sproule happen to get hold of you again!"

But at the mere mention of that dread name the boy fell to shivering and shaking, so that the man beside him saw that something deeper than he knew was at the bottom of the matter.

"I am to blame that the wretch got out," he said, rising and walking up and down. "I was not here to appear against him when his case was called, so there was nothing to do but to discharge him with a warning. I was out of town. My mother, Joe, my dear mother, died last week. She was stricken on Christmas Day, and I stayed with her until the end. That is why I seemed to neglect my palpable duty."

The boy looked as if he knew he ought to say something, but not knowing what to say, he fidgeted and said nothing.

Mr. McCabe continued to pace the room in silence for a few moments after he ceased speaking. Suddenly he paused and said:

"Joe, out of all my friends—out of all the hundreds of men and women I have known in my life, at the supreme moment of parting with

my mother there was but one woman I wanted to see. There was but one woman I would have welcomed in the sickroom, and that woman was Miss Mattie Morningglory! I longed for my mother to hear her message of hope and faith, and, in my grief, I longed for Miss Mattie's courage and her knowledge of the unknown."

The boy's face lost its look of terror for a moment, and beamed with pride at this tribute to his foster-mother.

"She would have come, if you'd sent for her," he said simply. "She's that good, people in trouble just have to let her know they need her. She's even curin' Mrs. Galloway's mean old auntie! Maybe,—oh, Mr. McCabe!—maybe she could have healed your mother!"

The man looked bewildered. He raised his head.

"I wonder!" he said. "I wonder if that was why I kept thinking of her! Yet to send for her—I'm so nearly a stranger to you all—I never would have thought of such a thing. Still, as you say, I believe she would have come!"

"Sure she would!" declared Joe.

"Then," said the man, turning suddenly on the boy, "realizing her goodness, and how much she loves you, why did you run away from her?"

The boy shook as if with ague, but there was no resisting the power of Matt McCabe's deepset eyes.

"I—I stole some money from her!" he gasped out.

"Stole some money from Miss Mattie!" repeated Mr. McCabe, with horrified incredulity. "When?"

"Just before Christmas, but she only found it out last night!"

"What did you do it for?"

"To give old Sproule! A long time ago he made me promise, no matter where I was, to get it for him — somehow!"

The man eyed the boy sternly. He felt that there was something more.

"Who is old Sproule, Joe?"

The boy panted with fright.

"I don't dare tell! He'd kill me, if I told!" he wailed.

"Tell me. I will protect you, Joe. Why, I have sworn out a warrant for him already on the grounds of what I discovered when I found you. And this time I'll send him to the pen for more years than you are old."

For the first time the boy seemed to breathe.

"Sure?" he asked.

"Sure!" said the man, with hearty conviction.

He sat down beside the couch, and took the lad's thin hand in his own strong, warm clasp.

"Tell me, Joe!"

"He's my father!" gasped the boy.

"Your father!" repeated Mr. McCabe "Non-sense! I don't believe it. Do you?"

Relieved of his secret, and reassured by the kindly pressure of the man's hand, the boy lay back on his pillow and breathed naturally.

"Don't you?" he asked eagerly. "Sometimes I don't! But I can't remember anybody but him, and he always says he is!"

"Why should he threaten to kill you if you tell?" asked the man.

"I don't know. Only he does!"

"Because he knew, if you told, somebody would find out the truth, and for some reason he wanted to keep you. What was the reason, Joe?" The boy's face burned.

"I could always get money!" he said. "If I did n't earn it, I always — got it for him. He said it was my honest face done the trick. And he taught me lots of ways. He's awful smart in things like that. He teaches other boys, too. But he says I'm the best one he ever had!"

A note of unrighteous pride crept into the boy's tone as he uttered this strange compliment.

"How long have you been doing—this sort of thing?" asked Mr. McCabe, with an aversion to the unsavoriness of the subject he was frankly sure he would not have felt at one time—so prone was he to regard such things as all in the day's work and therefore beyond his jurisdiction. But

for this lad of Miss Mattie's the man was realizing a responsibility as agreeable as it was novel. The moral helplessness of this waif she had started to save appealed to his rugged rectitude and gave him a sense of the possibility of his own usefulness in the matter, which was unusual to him.

"I don't remember," said Joe. "I only know that I'd just begun to learn, when I got bad in the legs, and at first I was afraid to tell him, for fear he'd do something to me. But he found it out for himself, once when he knocked me down and I could n't get up. Then he laughed, and said I'd be fine for jobs after I got worse. If Miss Mattie knew that, she'd say it was my fear of what he'd make me do that made me get worse."

Mr. McCabe felt that the boy was telling the truth, yet he was not quite sure. He questioned further.

- "But old Sproule was in jail when you took Miss Mattie's money!"
 - "I knew he'd get out!"
 - "Do you think he'll get out this time?"
 - "No, sir!"
 - "Why not?"
- "Because now you've learned how smart he is, and you won't let him get ahead of you, cause you're smarter 'n' he is! But you're the only man I could say that about!"

Matt McCabe laughed.

"Thanks! I'll try to deserve that compliment! Now tell me. Are you ever going to take anything from Miss Mattie again?"

To the man's consternation, the boy burst into a passion of tears.

"Oh no, no!" he sobbed. His voice rose almost to a scream. "If you only knew what I've suffered! Havin' her so good to me, and standin' up for me when that girl of Larry's pitched on to me and told her I done it! She would n't b'lieve it!"

"Who pitched on to you?" asked the man. The boy struggled to control himself.

"That girl of Larry McMahon's — the feller that pulled off that big di'mond robbery last year! Don't you remember it? Maggie Connor told me that Miss Mattie was in love with Larry and he fooled her, 'cause Blanche was his girl all the time. Miss Mattie was awful sick in the hospital, and when she come out she began takin' us kids in."

Matt McCabe rose suddenly.

"It is getting dark. I'll light up!" he said, and cleared his throat roughly.

He switched on the light and began pacing the floor again, his head bent, his hands clasped behind him, and his eyes fixed on the floor.

"Waifs!" he said at last. "Three motherless, fatherless waifs!"

"Gloria's got a mother and father!" said the boy, proud of being able to impart so much of interest. "I heard them talking. Blanche Terranova's her mother, 'n' Larry McMahon's her father! Miss Mattie cried awful, and Blanche never said another mean word to her. That Blanche is no good! I know her kind."

Matt McCabe paused in his walking, and regarded the boy with inscrutable eyes.

"Yet Miss Mattie was tender with her. She held out her hand to Blanche!" he said at last.

"You bet she did. Tried to get her to quit and be decent for Gloria's sake. And I'll bet she will, too! Miss Mattie'll never let up on her till she does."

Mr. McCabe nodded his head slowly. Then he said:

"Do you know that you ought not to repeat conversations like that? You overheard what was not intended for you to hear. I should not have allowed you to tell even me. At first I did not realize how you came by it, or what you were going to say. Afterwards, I—"

He paused, and looked up at a framed picture hanging on the wall. It was the face of a woman — very beautiful and noble, but lacking just the one intangible something which would have made it human.

Regardless of the presence of the boy, the man went close to the picture and regarded it long and earnestly.

"Who is that lady?" asked Joe curiously.

Mr. McCabe shrank from the boy's frank question.

"It is — it was —"

He broke off, as if unable to speak the words.

"Come!" he said looking at his watch. "It's dinner time. Shall we have it up here to-night? To-morrow, if you feel better, we'll go down into the dining room, and I'll ask Bob to join us. I'll ring for the bill of fare now, and you can order whatever you like!"

That night, after Joe had fallen asleep, delighted to sleep in such a fine bed and in a suit of silk pajamas, albeit a world too large for him, the man paced the floor of his two rooms in long strides. His mind was in a whirl. Joe's story of Miss Mattie's newest struggle woke in him the profoundest admiration. Ever and anon he paused to look at the framed picture on the wall, and then once more took up his ceaseless, untiring walk.

Finally he threw back his head. His face was alight with purpose. He went to the picture, took it down from the wall, kissed its lips, and then laid it face downward in a drawer in his desk, which he carefully locked.

CHAPTER XXIV

In Which Mrs. Shapiro Cannot Lie like Maggie, and Jealousy Ensues

THERE was a feud of many years' standing between the City Editor and the Advertising Manager. The battle ground was anywhere they happened to meet, and nothing, not even the band of black on Matt McCabe's sleeve and the fact that the force knew his mother had died during the holidays, prevented a recurrence of hostilities. Each time they clashed, Mr. McCabe vowed that the situation grew more impossible every day, and threatened to sever a connection which included such possibilities of unbearable friction. If the right opening offered, the force knew that the Advertising Manager meant what he said, when he declared that no roof was large enough to cover two such antagonists much longer.

Both men were so valuable to the "Old Man" that hitherto he had been able to salve all wounds by a prompt and soothing raise in salary. But even he realized that a crisis was inevitable. Mr. McCabe's ten-year contract would end in about six months, and when the Old Man suggested a renewal the Advertising Manager politely declined to consider it.

This state of affairs caused the force to sit up whenever the warring factors met.

The last battle took place in the double office which served both the city and managing editors—a room partitioned off only halfway to the ceiling, so that any one could overhear what was being said.

Just outside this office was the long row of reporters' desks and typewriters, which at this hour was nearly empty.

One desk, however, was occupied. A short, dumpy little creature, with a small, shiny red nose set in the midst of a mottled face, who was known to the editors as the Female Space Writer, and to the force as "The Ferret," placed herself at the desk nearest the open door and frankly listened. And as Mr. McCabe flung himself out of the office, red-faced and angry, he recognized her ruse.

Miss Mostyn rose quickly and tried to stop him, but he brushed past her and strode up the three steps which led to his own part of the building. Nor did he stop grinding his teeth until he had dropped into his revolving chair, snapped the green shade over his eyes, and buried himself in his work.

Bob Avery, hunting up old files for a free lance who needed data, was going back and forth between the gate which kept out strangers and the row of editorial offices, and the boy's sharp eyes even took in the look the Ferret shot after his chief.

Now Bob's eyes were, as Gracie described them, "pools of smartness," and in this instance he lived up to her ideal of him, for he deliberately trailed the space writer and, under cover of his task, did a very neat bit of detective work.

He watched her follow Mr. McCabe to his desk, saw her interrupt his work, heard her invite him to join a party of fellow workers at a box party at the theatre, and heard him refuse, with less consideration than he generally showed to a woman, for her persistent attentions had begun to annoy him as well as cause comment. Bob saw her crafty eyes search the pigeon holes of Mr. McCabe's desk, and then saw her retire from the field, apparently repulsed. But just here was where the Ferret needed watching the most. She looked stupid, and she made the most of it. Few suspected her. Bob hated her, because he felt that she cared for his chief and that she would be dangerous if thwarted. He had, of course, never dared hint such a thing to Mr. McCabe, but he could and did keep a sharp lookout on the lady, who fancied herself secure.

As soon as she had too humbly accepted her rebuff—accepted it so humbly that it made Mr. McCabe uncomfortable to remember it, she disappeared. But Bob, knowing her habits,

saw her slip back and conceal herself in the filing room, in the darkness of which she would be safe.

Presently Mr. McCabe leaned back, yawned, looked at his watch, and then sat quietly thinking. Suddenly his feet came down sharply, he slammed his desk shut, flung his green shade on top of it, seized his coat and hat, and went out.

The Ferret followed.

The next morning Bob crept up to his chief's elbow and, seeing him smile up at him, the boy said:

"Mr. McCabe, if you don't mind, I've got something to tell you—something you ought to know!"

The man leaned back.

"Sounds mysterious, Bob! Fire away! I'm all ears!"

Cautiously the boy brought his head down.

"I don't know as you'll think it's important, sir," he began, "but yesterday evening that woman—Miss Mostyn—hid in the filing room and watched you! Then she trailed you to Miss Mattie's and waited till you came out. Then she followed you to Delmonico's, and this morning, while you were in the composing room, I caught her just sneaking away from your desk."

Mr. McCabe narrowed his eyes. Then he turned and swept his desk with a swift glance, which took in its every possibility to such a mind as the Ferret's. He was so large minded himself

he found it difficult to understand small natures, and in his disregard of their workings he often made serious mistakes. He was sufficiently astute to diagnose Miss Mostyn's case as incipient jealousy. He realized also that to a conceit like hers a rebuff of one woman could only mean suspicion that another woman held the citadel, yet, manlike, he took no precautions to circumvent any evil she might plan. A small, narrow book caught his attention.

He leaned forward, pulled it gingerly from beneath a mass of papers, and ran over the stubs. Then he nodded his head two or three times, and a look of quick disgust overspread his face.

"This was what she was after!" he said. "Thank you, Bob! Forewarned is forearmed! A beautiful, clean mind the lady has!"

The next day Bob reported that Miss Mostyn had called at Mr. McCabe's hotel and, finding him out, had managed to go to his rooms and see Joe, who innocently reported that she was such a nice lady and had been so very kind and interested in what he had to say.

"Pumped him dry, most likely," was Bob's comment.

Matt McCabe's eyes twinkled on the young detective.

"What are you trying to prove, son?" he asked. Bob's face flushed a mortified crimson.

"Nothing, sir!" he stammered. "I'm only telling you to be careful. She means mischief."

"Nonsense!" said the man. "She's rubbering, that's all! She won't do anything!"

Bob took the hint and said no more. But soon after this, on the second day, in fact, the Ferret called on Miss Mattie, bought a hat, and literally turned the unsuspicious mind of the milliner wrong side out. Then Miss Mostyn had her hair dressed at Maggie Connor's, and there learning of Mrs. Shapiro, she bought a basket of fruit of that lady and went away, knowing more than all of them put together.

Maggie Connor was the only one who suspected anything.

"Trouble's brewin' for Miss Mattie!" she said to her mother. "That old cat's on her trail."

"I would n't cahl her a cat," remonstrated her mother. "I thought, afther you got her fixed up, that she looked reel nice and stylish!"

"Gwan, Ma!" said Maggie scornfully. "Your idear of style is to stick yer little finger out, 'n' walk like a horse's hind legs! Nobody around here's got the natural style to her that Miss Mattie has if she'd only dhress the part. D' ye mind how she looked when Gracie done her hair?"

"But what makes you think throuble's brewin' for her?" asked her mother.

"I dinnaw!" answered Maggie. "I feel it in me elbows. That cat's on her trail, I'm tellin' you, and for no good purpose."

"Sure, I hope no harm comes to her. She's a good woman, Miss Mattie is!"

"None better!" declared Maggie. "I'd wipe up the walk wit any wan that thried to do her dirt."

Naturally, Miss Mattie suspected nothing. The second time Miss Mostyn called, Miss Mattie was hearing Gracie's lessons and when Miss Mostyn affably invited herself into the back room, politely saying she did not want the lesson interrupted, Miss Mattie opened her heart to her without reserve.

Now, if there was a time when Miss Mattie did not shine, it was while teaching the children. Her own education had been forgotten to such an extent that she frankly taught herself while teaching them, and in this, she succeeded fairly well. Her greatest blunders were in mispronouncing words.

"I do the best I can," she said once when even Mrs. Galloway ventured a mild remonstrance. "But it seems to me the men that wrote this spelling book just tried to be malicious and confusing, sticking in so many letters that don't belong!"

"They're silent—them letters is. That's what they used to tell me," said Mrs. Galloway.

"Well, they are n't silent when I get to them!" declared Miss Mattie. "I rout them out and make them work, now I tell you!"

And indeed, it was something to remember to hear Miss Mattie deal with diphthongs.

It chanced that an unusually difficult lesson was in progress when Miss Mostyn was there, and after listening in rapt attention to Miss Mattie's handling of the words, the visitor rose to go.

Miss Mattie felt that she had not done so well as usual, but she explained it to Miss Mostyn on the ground that her son was coming home that day after a visit with a friend, and upon hearing this bit of news, Miss Mostyn departed rather precipitately, not caring to risk a recognition.

Even Mr. McCabe would not be a witness to the meeting between Miss Mattie and Joe. He brought the boy home in an automobile, then captured Gracie and Gloria for a ride, leaving Joe to roll his chair in by himself.

As the limousine started, Mr. McCabe could not help seeing that Miss Mattie came running in and bent over the chair, taking Joe in her arms with all the love in the world in her face. Not a look of reproach or a whisper of blame would, he felt sure, be meted out to the lad—just the joy of having her boy back again where her kind arms could hold him close, and her willing feet wait on

him until his faltering steps grew strong and well. It was the healing thought, he knew, and Gracie found her companion less merry and talkative than usual, for the man had left his mind in the back room of the shop, where a woman, with white cheeks and big eyes, but with magic in her sad face, was opening up to the humiliated lad that shining road to a new life which every prodigal is led to view. The father's kiss, the robe, the ring of gold were all in Miss Mattie's tender words and eager voice, and Joe was not ashamed to lay his head in her maternal arms and sob out his contrition and desire to begin again.

"Turn ye!"

The Voice which constantly echoed in Miss Mattie's mind gave her the words of comfort to speak to Joe, and when the children came back they found a new Joe — subdued, chastened, but honest, this time, in his determination to deserve the love these three innocent hearts poured out upon him, in such generous measure.

What had passed between Joe and Mr. McCabe in the week the boy had been the man's guest no one would ever know. Possibly, while admiring Miss Mattie, Mr. McCabe might have thought that she was too easy with a young criminal of the type of Joe, trained in a hypocrisy few would suspect. Miss Mattie felt that a change had taken place in the lad, and in her loyalty she

immediately attributed it to the influence of the high-minded man to whom she had trusted Joe.

Certainly there had been some wonderfully frank talks between the boy and the man, and if Joe had not been actually threatened, he, at least came from those interviews with the very healthful belief in his mind that if ever he must begin over and behave, now was the time to do it. For with old Sproule safely housed at government expense for a term of years, Joe felt that the court of last appeal would be Mr. McCabe himself, and after lodging with him for a week, the boy declined to consider the possibility of offending him.

Mrs. Galloway interrupted the talk Miss Mattie and Joe were having,—a talk of such divine import and comfort to Miss Mattie that for the first time she almost wished her privacy were a little more secure.

But no one could resist the ponderous kindliness of Mrs. Galloway, and her persistent goodness would wear out the most hardened resistance.

"He looks better," she said, surveying him through her spectacles. "And he looks different!"

"He is n't the same boy!" declared Miss Mattie happily, giving Joe a look replete with secret meaning.

"His visit has improved him," agreed Mrs. Galloway. "He looks more of a man. I always said Joe had a backbone, 'n' all he needed was to

hev it brought forward. Mr. McCabe's done it."

Miss Mattie was a listener who invited extended description, and for days Joe fascinated her with particulars of that wonderful visit to an hotel, whose conveniences, luxuries, and marvels drew sighs of appreciation and satisfaction from her lips.

"Land sakes!" she would say, pausing in the act of cooking, cleaning, or hat-making to listen to some detail that Joe had overlooked, "But I'm glad that good man has such comforts about him. He deserves every one of them, Joe. There is n't, literally, there is n't any end to the kindliness of his heart."

Miss Mattie listened, round-eyed, to Joe's description of the picture on the wall that Mr. McCabe had looked at and talked to, but which had mysteriously disappeared from its place during the first night of Joe's visit.

"Did n't you ever speak about it?" asked Miss Mattie, in an awed voice.

Joe shook his head.

"I did n't dast! There's some things you just don't dast to do with that man, Miss Mattie. He's kind and gentle on the outside, but there's a look in his eyes that says thunder and lightning if you go too far."

"I know!" nodded Miss Mattie. "I've seen it. But I like it, Joe. I respect what's behind those eyes."

"It gives me goose flesh!" declared Joe.

The last of January slid away and February set in with storms which kept them all indoors. It was between seasons for the millinery business, except for laying in Easter supplies, so Miss Mattie had more time than usual to spend with the children. She was a nimble and indefatigable needlewoman, and inspired the same kind of awe in Mrs. Galloway, on account of the dresses she could turn out, that Mrs. Galloway's prowess in housekeeping excited in Miss Mattie.

Easter came late this year, and Miss Mattie was preparing an unusually elaborate display. Creations she had only dreamed out, she was now able to bring into being, thanks to her legacy from Mrs. McCabe, and Gracie was frantic with admiration of Miss Mattie's skill.

Miss Mattie sang often to herself on these snowy February days. She had a plan in her mind so golden with hope and beauty of purpose that her smile seemed perpetual.

One day she was returning from a tiresome trip to the wholesale houses when the thought struck her of how radically Joe was improving since his moral renovation at the hands of Mr. McCabe and the repudiation of all the paralyzing mental processes of his old life. He could get along fairly well now, without his chair, when he was alone with the family, but if strangers came in or he was on the street, his fear made him weak again.

This did not disturb Miss Mattie. She clung, as always, to the longest reach upward as her highwater mark, and promptly destroyed in her consciousness the depths through which she had come.

Beaming with gratitude, she hurried home. She had not time to remove even her veil, before her ears were assailed by a babel of voices. Mrs. Galloway, Gracie, Joe, the Connors, and Mrs. Shapiro were all talking at once and all telling her the news.

The truant officer had been there, and had announced that both Gracie and Joe must go to school.

"School!" cried Miss Mattie. "Why, they are n't able to! I know they are being healed, and I declare it every hour in the day, but I have never let Gracie cross the street alone, and as for Joe, why—"

"That's just it!" declared Mrs. Galloway. "Joe was standin' up as nice as you please, when the man come in, 'n' when he said that about their goin' to school Joe dropped down, like he does, you know, 'n' then the man said he was fakin', 'n' he got reel ugly."

"Where is the nearest school?" asked Miss Mattie, with an obedience to the law and a rendering-unto-Caesar thought, which was characteristic of her.

"Right near the hospital — the next block!" said Maggie Connor.

"Why, that's almost a mile!" cried Miss Mattie. "Surely there must be one nearer!"

"There is, but it's full. The man said th' childern'd have to go to the Morningside School."

"I could n't let them go alone. I'd have to go with them myself, or get somebody to go with them and go after them every day. It will be hard, but I suppose I've got to do it."

She thought a moment, then she said:

"I wonder if they would n't be satisfied if I went and told them the children were being taught every day, just as regularly as if they were in school?"

"I told the man that!" said Mrs. Galloway, but he said it had been reported to the authorities that the teacher was n't competent!"

The slow red stained Miss Mattie's cheeks. Mrs. Galloway's loud breathing showed her indignation.

"Arrah!" shouted Maggie Connor. "What did I tell you, Ma? I bet I know the cat what reported yuh! It was that rubber-neck that was nosin' around among all of us a little while ago. D' you mind, Ma? Did n't I tell yuh, Ma? What did yez ever do to her, Miss Mattie-dear, to make her hate yuh?"

"I never did anything to anybody!" declared Miss Mattie, bewildered by Maggie's violence. And so innocent of malice was Miss Mattie's heart that she could not imagine whom Maggie meant.

No one knew her name, and the lady would not have been flattered if she had heard the various descriptions by which the Connor women tried to recall her to Miss Mattie.

"Thry to think, Miss Mattie-dear! Has anybody heard yuh give th' childern a lesson lately?"

"Why, yes!" admitted Miss Mattie. "There was a lovely young lady heard me give Gracie all her lessons!"

"Holy Mike! A lovely young lady!" repeated. Maggie. "She's a complexion like a checker-board, and if she thaht she'd ever see forty again she'd dislocate her spine grabbin' fer ut!"

"What-a day was eet?" demanded Mrs. Shapiro excitedly, aroused by Maggie's description.

"About three weeks ago," said Maggie. "Was n't it, Ma?"

"Let me think," murmured Miss Mattie. "Why, I know. It was the very day Joe came home! Was n't it, Gracie?"

"Is that the lady Maggie is talking about!" exclaimed the child, shocked. "Why, she seemed so nice and interested, and asked so many kind questions!"

"Kind questions!" repeated Maggie, with a hard laugh. "I'll bet she did! She asked a few more of me, but I put her off with a fancy line of lies that made her go elsewhere for her facts!"

"She came to me!" declared Mrs. Shapiro. "And I told her — everytheeng!" She threw out her hands in despair. "Now I have-a done you a hurt, Mees-a Mattie! Why could I not-a know enough to lie like-a Maggie?"

"What did youse tell her?" asked Maggie, as true to the scent as a bloodhound.

"I told her about-a da children and about Mees-a Mattie's grand-a friend, Meester McCabe!"

At this admission Maggie threw her apron over her head and rocked her body back and forth, lifting her feet from the floor at each oscillation. But although she emerged, red-faced from repressed emotion, she said nothing.

The others regarded her with amazement and a curiosity which was about to voice itself when Joe broke in:

"Say," he cried, "I wonder if that is the woman that came to see me, while I was at Mr. McCabe's hotel! Bob Avery told me if she ever came again not to open my mouth to her. He said to pertend I was dumb!"

"Anh! hanh!" triumphed Maggie. "Now

we're gettin' down to hard tacks! That Bob Avery's the only one in this bunch, besides myself, that's got any brains. Th' rest of yez have only got cold mush in the place of 'em! So! She's even pumped Joe! Made ye spill every little bit of infarmation ye was loaded with, did n't she, Joe?"

The boy blushed with confusion.

"Bob's already jumped on me!" he said resentfully.

Maggie slapped her knee a resounding whack.

"Me for Bob!" she cried. "Sure, he's 'most as smart as I am mesilf! I can say no more!"

"But what does it all mean?" asked Miss Mattie, bewildered. "Why does she hate me? What have I ever done to her?"

Maggie bit her lip, looked at Mrs. Galloway, then at Miss Mattie, then at her mother, smiled, started to speak, then shook her head.

"Nuh!" she cried, jumping up. "I'll imertate me chief, Detective Avery, and I'll keep me tongue between me teeth. It ain't time to tell yuh what I know! Some day I will, but not now. But I'll give yuh wan bit of advice. Sind for Mr. McCabe, tell him what th' truant officer said had been rayported, and tell him who told on yuh! Gee! I wisht I could see 'em th' next time they meet!"

"Who?" asked Miss Mattie.

"Gwan!" laughed Maggie. "Th' hare and the hound! No less!"

"Ye rattle-brained hussy!" smiled her mother fondly. "I don't belave ye know yersilf what yez are talkin' about!"

"Don't say I'm that much like yersilf!" said Maggie impudently. "Come on, Ma! The fuse is lit, th' clock wound! Let's beat it before the bomb explodes! So long, everybody! Say, Miss Mattie, if ye are afraid of a dynamite explosion, don't sind for yer friend, Mr. McCabe! Write what ye have to say!"

CHAPTER XXV

SISTER-WOMEN

"IF IT'S going to stir him up, I most certainly won't tell him," said Miss Mattie to herself. "I don't know what Maggie's hinting at, but it won't do any harm to keep as far from trouble as I can. Enough comes my way without my hunting it. I wonder how I can make up my mind to send those children to school! Just seems 's if now I've come to something I can't do! I know there's an Answer somewhere. I'll find it!"

She sat down with the Book which had never yet failed her in her hand, and its loosened pages fell open at the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Tears fell from Miss Mattie's eyes as she read how the man and boy climbed the steep hillside, on what the father thought was his last walk with his only son.

"Just think of it!" whispered Miss Mattie to herself. "What must have been the agony of that man's heart! How his voice must have trembled when he answered, 'My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering,' when all the time he knew that little lad was to be the lamb. Oh, my! I do think there are the most pathetic things in the Bible — stories that most

break your heart to read. I do love the place where Abraham found out he need n't do it. How he must have felt! Well, there's a lesson here for me. All I've got to do is to be willing and obedient to just God's will, and the suffering will be taken away from me, just as Abraham's was. And I don't have to be obedient to sorrow! If I'm making idols out of those children, I want them taken away from me — or at least I've got to come to wanting them taken away! But if this is just evil trying to act like the voice of God, I won't be made to suffer! I'll wait and see! And I'll just remember one thing. My Elder Brother's got hold of my hand now!"

She looked at the clock.

"It's time she was here!" she said.

The opening of the door made her turn, and Blanche Terranova stood hesitating on the threshold.

"Come right in!" said Miss Mattie. "I was afraid you'd be late. This is about the best time for me to get my own private business done. You're looking better!"

The girl crept in, her eyes on Miss Mattie, trying to gauge her intentions.

Miss Mattie smiled.

"What are you afraid of, Blanche? Do you think I've got a brick behind me? Why, I'm your friend, child. I thought I'd proved that

to you. Have you never had any kindness shown to you in your life?"

"Nothin' that did n't have a string tied to it!" said the girl significantly.

"Take the rocking chair!" said Miss Mattie cordially. "How are you getting on?"

The girl sat down and looked out of the window.

"Not very well," she said, dully. It seemed as if much of her vivid bloom had departed. Life had taken on a grayer tone since the last time Miss Mattie saw her. Es lebe das leben seemed to have drifted into a forced retrospection which, while it temporarily saddened, yet spelled hope to the eager eyes which were studying her and looking deep down into her soul, with the necessity of saving it in their depths.

There was a short pause. Then Blanche drew in her gaze.

"Miss Mattie," she said, "you won't believe me, but I thought over what you said the other night and I tried to break away — to get a job to be different, for — for her sake! I hunted up every position I heard of. But they all meant just the same thing!"

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Mattie.

"I mean wages so low that no girl could live on them and be honest. So I can't see that I could do any different, if I did work in a store!"

without experience — or a reference. You don't know what you're talking about, Miss Mattie!"

"Don't I?" asked Miss Mattie. "I bet I do. What do you think of this hat? I just finished it."

She handed the most extreme hat in her shop to Blanche. The girl's whole face took on a different expression as she examined it. Then she doffed her own hat, and with an instinct born, and never acquired, she set this new one carefully on her head, drawing it on from the back, pulling it gently forward, then crushing it over her ears in a way which made the milliner sigh with delight. Blanche turned her head. Even her expression matched the hat.

"Prettiest thing I ever saw!" declared Miss Mattie. She sighed again. "My land, but I'm tired! I'm so driven, with all I've got to do—the children and their clothes and the shop—I'm so worn out sometimes I don't feel as if I could stand it."

"Why don't you get a little girl to help you with the children?" asked Blanche.

"I don't need anybody to help me with the children," said Miss Mattie, seizing the opportunity thus made, "but I'd like to have you help me with the hats, if you'll come!"

Blanche rose with such violence she overturned her chair. Her face flamed.

"Me?" she gasped. "Me? Come here where everybody knows me? Are you trying to ruin yer trade?"

"I've been thinking of this for some time, and slowly making up my mind to ask you. That's why I sent for you to come here to-day."

Miss Mattie faced her bravely, her eyes clinging to the girl's face, which alternately flamed with color and turned pale with emotion.

"I don't know what to make of you, Miss Mattie. I guess you ain't quite right in your mind. Why, I could n't stand it to come here. It might be all right for a day or two, till people caught on. Then you'd see a falling off of customers, and — your trade could n't stand it!"

"Try it and see! I've got plenty of money back of me, thanks be to my Heavenly Father! And I want you, Blanche. You'd be a real help to me."

"I'd ruin you!" repeated the girl obstinately. "Besides," she added, with a flash of her old hate and suspicion, "if you're asking me here out of charity — not needing me, but just so that you could look down on me—"

The violence in the girl's voice melted under the reproach in Miss Mattie's eyes.

"Do you think I'd be so mean?" she asked. "Have n't you any sort of idea of what it

means to love your neighbor as yourself? How cruel are you to yourself, Blanche? Are n't you pretty good to yourself, according to your lights?"

"You just bet I am!" cried the girl. "I often

think I'm the only real friend I got."

"You're the only real enemy you've got!" cried Miss Mattie, switching around with bewildering rapidity. "You've got your first chance to be good to yourself and choose good instead of evil. But you are too foolish to take it!"

The girl hesitated. She understood talk of that sort.

"Maybe I'm not!" she said. "If you are game to try me, I - I. Oh, Miss Mattie, it's my wanting to come so bad, but being afraid I'll hurt you, and I don't want to do that!"

"You poor lamb!" said Miss Mattie. "Just you take hold of my hand! I'm your sisterwoman. We've been through a heap—you and I—and now we're going to pull out and do it together! When can you come?"

The girl's eyes brightened; her face softened.

"Whenever you want me!" she said.

"Then take off your hat and start right in.

I believe you'll make a good saleswoman."

"Why?" asked Blanche.

"Because you understand that everybody has to be treated different," answered Miss Mattie.

Blanche nodded.

"The same sort of a jolly does n't go with everybody. You've got to know what is their weakest point and play up to it," she said.

Miss Mattie paused.

"I never stopped long enough to think that out before," she murmured.

The face of a beautiful girl could be seen in front of the show window.

"That's Cornie Cornelius," whispered Miss Mattie. "She's on the stage, and I've got a hat she's simply obliged to buy. I'll put it in this drawer and you save it till the last. Don't act too eager—"

"Me?" whispered Blanche. "Would you trust me with—"

"My best customer? Sure I would!" answered Miss Mattie. "She's spoiled and contrary and—"

"What else?" whispered Blanche eagerly as the door opened and Miss Cornelius sauntered in.

"Thinks she's smart," murmured Miss Mattie. "Alan Dale wrote her up once and praised what he called 'her quick wit." I think he was making fun of her, but she believed it and ever since she's been looking for another chance to—how do you do, Miss Cornelius? I have n't seen you in an age. Have you got a good part this time?"

"So-so!" answered Miss Cornelius, indifferently.

Miss Mattie invisibly raised her eyebrows at

Blanche. Both knew that for the first time in her life Miss Cornelius was being featured, and her pride therein was so great that life was hard for her immediate associates.

"I'll bet the leading woman is jealous of you!" said Miss Mattie shrewdly.

As if responding to a quite irresistible fly, Miss Cornelius rose to the bait and swallowed it.

For half an hour she described to her two sympathetic auditors how the leading woman of the Blue Circle Theatre Stock Company had been so jealous of her as to declare that she, Cornie, stole her big scene. And she told how this finally led to an offer from Max Mohler of the Promenade Theatre to do a special act in his new revue.

"But it's worse there!" declared Miss Cornelius pathetically, "for I get so many more curtains than anybody else—"

She broke off the well worn story to look at the hats Blanche was artfully assembling.

"How do you like this one I've got on?" asked Miss Cornelius. "It's a Bendel model."

Miss Mattie put her head on one side, thoughtfully examining it for a moment.

Then she turned suddenly to Blanche.

"Do you like it on her?" she asked.

"It's lovely, but too old for her," answered Blanche quickly. "A woman of twenty-two could wear it."

Miss Cornelius was twenty-three, but she possessed the wistful, fragile beauty of eighteen, and anxiously dressed the part. She removed the offending hat hastily.

Miss Mattie turned away to hide a smile of pride in Blanche and moved forward to attend another customer, just entering.

She tried to hear what the two girls were saying, for every once in a while one or the other would laugh.

Blanche was assembling the good looking hats, but saving the irresistible ones for the last.

It was fully an hour before Miss Mattie's own customer was satisfied and released her.

Miss Cornelius was standing up just ready to go, pinning her smart black satin cartwheel in place. Up to that time, however, Miss Mattie could see by the anxious look in Blanche's eyes that the difficult Miss Cornelius had decided on nothing.

Four hats had been laid aside on approval.

Blanche came up behind Miss Cornelius and crushed a black velvet hat on her own smartly coiffured little head. Her face appeared in the long mirror over Miss Cornelius' shoulder.

"A velvet hat," said Blanche dreamily, "is as kind to your face as a lover!"

A gleam came into the eyes of Miss Cornelius.

"And a satin hat is as plainspoken as a husband!" she flashed.

Miss Mattie and Blanche broke into applauding laughter.

Miss Cornelius twisted her lips. She turned beamingly on the milliners. She was more pleased with herself than she was with the hats, unmistakably smart though they were. Her pleasure made her expansive.

"I'll take those four," she said carelessly.

Miss Mattie checked Blanche's gasp of delighted surprise by a look meant to be stern.

Blanche took down the address, and both escorted Miss Cornelius the length of the sales-room.

As the great door closed behind her, Miss Mattie and her new assistant spoke no word. They simply faced each other with shining eyes, and a look of perfect commercial understanding passed between them.

CHAPTER XXVI

MAGGIE CONNOR TAKES HER STAND

FIRMLY believing that she would never be called upon to send the children to school, Miss Mattie nevertheless got them ready to go. They themselves were rather anxious to make the experiment, albeit Joe was so sensitive as to what the other children would say that he grew worse, until he sat in his wheeled chair most of the time.

Still Miss Mattie prepared to obey the law's summons. And the neighbors gave her minute directions along every line.

"I certainly do love those neighbor-women," sighed Miss Mattie when she was alone, "but I can't help wishing I had just a little more right to live to suit myself. They don't mean to be bossy or dictating, but it does seem sometimes as if they tell me which breath to draw next!"

Her eyes wandered to Joe, seated so patiently in his old chair, when twice he had realized sufficient healing to be practically rid of it, only to be thrown back by the apparent power of the adversary.

"I wish," said Miss Mattie fervently, "I wish I could send him away somewhere! If

Mr. McCabe would take that boy camping in the woods for a month next summer, where nobody could get at him or watch him or scare him back into helplessness, he'd be well! I'm going to work on that thought! I'm going to ask my Heavenly Father to open a way! All the suffering children in the world — all the lambs that can't keep up with the flock — have a place prepared for them of my Father. There are green pastures and still waters somewhere! And my Elder Brother says He has gone to prepare a place!"

The street gossiped vociferously about Miss Mattie's latest act in taking in Blanche Terranova. They all knew her for what she was, but no one dreamed she was Gloria's mother. Opinion was divided as to what stand the neighbor-women should take now. They realized Miss Mattie's courage and goodness, but they felt, like many other worthy souls, that it would be just as well for an unprotected woman, denied by grace of circumstances a husband's name and backing, not to indulge in charity of too courageous a sort, and especially a sort which challenged them to come out into the open and show whether they really were followers of their Master or were hypocrites, using the livery of heaven as a cloak. It disturbs and annoys the pious to have anyone like Miss Mattie living in their midst. Thus the only thing left for the neighbors to do to preserve

their moral equilibrium was to talk about her and discredit her motives. And this they did.

But there were a few — rare souls worthy to wear the white robe and the signet of the Most High, here and now — who reverenced Miss Mattie's purity of mind and applauded her courage, and, one by one, they came out from the shadows of cowardly tradition and stood shoulder to shoulder with her.

It was after listening to a fierce denunciation of Miss Mattie by several neighbor-women, gathered in Kurt Vogelsang's Delicatessen, that Maggie Connor came home and flung a package wrapped in waxed paper into her mother's sagging lap.

"There's the stuff for th' sandwidges, Ma! Kurt cut th' turkey while it was warm — a thing he hates to do, 'cause it wastes ut — just for me!"

She sat down in front of the fire, and scowled into it.

"What's botherin' ye, colleen?" asked her mother.

"Just the neighbor-women layin' down th' law an' th' prophets an' showin' off winther styles in Christianity!" growled the girl.

Her mother nodded.

"Sure, Ma, ye ought to have heard them pitch into Miss Mattie at Vogelsang's. But ye can't say that Miss Mattie does n't live her quare

religion to th' limit!" Maggie burst out, as if glad of the chance to talk. "Sure, I do dispise th' Christianity of the neighbor-women for the most part! Hypocrites! Liars! Gossups! Go to mission'ry meetin's 'n' pray fit to beat the band, 'n' take away a good woman's riputation while yuh wait, with th' pious look av the cat that's swalleyed th' canary. But did ye iver hear Miss Mattie gossup? Did ye iver know her to do anythin' mane or undherhanded? Did ye iver know her to withhold her hand if there was a lost soul to be pulled aboard th' raft? Not on yer life! She don't care what other people says or does! She just goes on her way 'n' says nothin'. But she lives her religion ivery minute of the day 'n' night! That she does! And me hat's off to her!"

Maggie's mother looked at her.

"Sure, I thank you did n't like her sometimes!" she said.

"Be th' same token, sometimes I don't! But do ye know why? It's because she shames me! Ain't I got th' same Gahd that she has? Sure I have! But do I let Him rule me life as she does? Sure I don't! I kape me Gahd in th' top bureau dhrawr wit me long gloves. And on wake-days I forgit Him so complately that I lie 'n' cheat in me business, 'n' gossup 'n' lose me timper, till I'm ashamed to look mesilf in th' eye.

I've watched Miss Mattie iver since she come out o' th' hospital, hopin' 'n' thrustin' that I'd find out she was fakin' her Christianity like all th' rist av us! But she ain't doin' ut! Honest, Ma! I don't belave ye cud put a proposition up to her—no matther how low down th' sinner was that naded her help—that she's dhraw back from. I git sand in me eyes whin I think av her takin' that critter in off th' streets—that Blanche Terranova—an' makin' her just as wilcome there as if she did n't have a riputation from wan ind av th' Tinderloin to th' other!"

"Th' strate likes her for doin' ut, but they're talkin' awful, just th' same," said Mrs. Connor.

"Set on by th' Waughs an' that cat that writes for the newspapers!" said Maggie. "But little does Miss Mattie care for th' tongues of anny of thim! D'ye mind th' time that little fool Ursula came home about tin o'clock an' seen Miss Mattie pacin' th' strate lookin' for Blanche?"

"No," said her mother. "Ye niver towld me. What of ut?"

"Well, Ursula'd been havin' her nip, young as she is — an' she was feelin' sassy, so she towld Miss Mattie she knew where Blanche was. 'Where?' sez Miss Mattie, wild-like. 'Where I had me own dinner with a couple o' gentleman friends,' sez the chit. 'At th' Café Liberty,' sez she. Well, I sorta hung 'round to see what

Miss Mattie'd do. Blest if she did n't go afther her," cried Maggie, "an' bring her home. 'T was near midnight when they passed me winduh. I was watchin' f'r thim, an' Miss Mattie had her arm around her! What do ye think of that f'r religin!"

"I think it's grand!" said her mother. "She's kep' Blanche from shlippin' back, sure's you're born. But th' wimmin gossup something awful!"

"They'd talk more if she was good lookin'!" sneered Maggie. "Sure, th' only thing that kapes th' female slander-tanks from shpillin' over an' dhrowndin' Miss Mattie in their filth is the fact that she's so plain th' wimmin ain't jealous of her looks. If they were — Gahd help her!" The girl paused and threw up her hands. "Gee! don't I pity th' good lookers in this world sometimes — whin I ain't busy bein' jellus of thim mesilf! They git knocked flat the firrst time th' wimmin get an excuse to swat thim — whin ahl th' time th' knowin' diagnose th' case as sheer divilish jillisy because th' min admire thim! Sure, Ma, I told Terence to tip Miss Mattie off if he seen Blanche tryin' to shlip back. An' he done ut twicet! Miss Mattie's thried so hard to save th' girrul, I thaht I'd help a bit!"

Her mother nodded.

[&]quot;An' shtill they talk!" she said.

[&]quot;That's what I'm tellin' yuh!" cried Maggie.

MAGGIE CONNOR TAKES HER STAND 401

"Th' Bibles of ivery wan o' thim gossups tills 'em to go after th' lost wans. But they don't do ut, an' they got to gossup about anny wan that does what they niver wud think av doin'! Swate as she is, Miss Mattie's riskin' her own good name by takin' Blanche in. An' lucky it is for Miss Mattie that Blanche is a woman. If 't was a man Miss Mattie was afther savin,' she'd lose her riputation intirely!"

"Whin they've seen wit their own eyes how good she is to iveryboddy?" questioned her mother.

Maggie laid her forefinger in the palm of her other hand.

"Yuh listen to me, Ma! Whin a woman does a brave act that ahl th' min do be praisin', th' wimmin go for her 'cause she's got th' courage to do what they wuddent, an' they show out their jillisy in that underhanded way. You watch an' see what happens to Miss Mattie."

Maggie brooded, and her mother watched her. "Ye've got somethin' on yer mind!" said the

old lady.

"Sure I have!" said Maggie somberly. "I don't want to be classed wit th' strate in th' way th' wimmin do be tahkin' about Miss Mattie! I'd like to show th' min that there was one girrul that stood by a good woman an' was n't afraid av th' tongues av th' warst av thim! We ain't so much oursilves Ma, but th' Irish niver were

cowards! What do ye say to comin' out an' showin' 'em? Les's invite Miss Mattie an' Blanche to supper — right under th' noses av th' whole strate! I'll git up a feed that they can smell from here to Harlem! I'm willin' to take Blanche Terranova be the hand! Come, Ma! What do ye say? Les's show th' strate where th' Connors stand!"

The old lady got up, and kissed her daughter. There were tears in her bright blue eyes.

"Sure, Maggie darlint, ye arre a good girrul! Aven if ye won't let me make a noise wit me soup! Ye are awful mane to me about blowin' on me coffee, an' nowadays ye'd niver let me take a bit o' comfort dhrinkin' me tay out of th' saucer, but ye have yer good points. An' I'm wit ye on the supper for th' girruls. I'll cook ut!"

"Sure you'll hafta cook ut if you count on its bein' et," said Maggie. "The last biskuts I made were sufferin' from prison pallor and a heavy heart. Sure you'll cook ut, and I do hope Mrs. Waugh will know you're doin' ut!"

Upon thought, Maggie's list of guests grew until it included Gracie and Joe, Mrs. Shapiro, Mrs. Galloway, and old auntie, and to these she added Bob Avery and Mr. McCabe.

"Ain't ye gon' tuh ask Kurt Vogelsang?" asked her mother in surprise.

Maggie's face crimsoned.

MAGGIE CONNOR TAKES HER STAND 403

"No, I ain't," she said. "He'll hear of ut, an' I ain't flauntin' me actions."

"Oh, ho!" said the old lady to herself. "Sits th' wind in that quarther! I'm beginnin' to think mebby th' colleen's in airnest wit that lad! Whin Maggie gits timud, then it's time for th' owld woman to look out!"

As for Miss Mattie herself, she did not dream of disapproval from her good neighbors. In her unworldliness she thought they would glory with her that the lost had been found, and indeed the beaming smile with which she greeted people innocently challenged them to speak their joy.

She met her first shock when she sent Gracie up to tell Mrs. Waugh that Ursula's hat was ready to try on. Gracie came back with a white look on her face, as if she understood more than the words implied.

"Mrs. Waugh says she has changed her mind and does n't want the hat. She says you can sell it to somebody else."

"Why, she ordered it!" exclaimed Miss Mattie, surprised. "I made the hat especially out of materials Mrs. Waugh selected. That is n't any way to do!"

More bewildered than annoyed, she turned away and met Blanche Terranova's eyes and quizzical smile. A light dawned on Miss Mattie.

"You don't mean to say — it is n't that, is it?" she questioned weakly.

Blanche slowly nodded her head, her teeth on her lower lip.

"Sure it is!" she answered. "The first gun has been fired by the enemy!"

Somewhere in Miss Mattie's ancestry there must have been warriors, or the words Blanche used would not have so stirred her martial blood. She stood quite still a moment, thinking. Then she lifted her head, and the color slowly rose in her pale cheeks, and her brown eyes blazed with the spirit of her forbears.

"Then we'll nail our colors to the flagstaff and never haul them down!" she cried. "I did n't believe a word of what you predicted that day, but if everything you said is going to happen, we'll stay right here in the shop, me and you and the children, and even if it's empty we'll thank our Heavenly Father that we know what Divine Love really is!"

Blanche flushed with grateful loyalty.

"I've got a plan," she said. "I know how to make flower muffs. I'm going to make a few. and maybe we can start a craze for them."

Miss Mattie nodded.

"Every one of those boxes are filled with flowers. I've got an idea of making flower toques in a new way. You can match them up

MAGGIE CONNOR TAKES HER STAND 405

with muffs of chiffon and flowers and then I'll think up some lovely way to introduce them. But Blanche, don't lay this up against Mrs. Waugh. She's our neighbor, remember!"

The news spread rapidly. Indeed, Mrs. Waugh was so, proud of having taken such a virtuous stand that she told of it herself.

"I have Ursula to think of!" she declared. "She is now nearly sixteen, and I am a careful mother. Miss Mattie has gone too far!"

Mrs. Shapiro heard of it, and climbed three flights of stairs to tell Mrs. Waugh that she would never speak to her again.

"It ees no way to take-a care of one vomans to pull-a another vomans down!" she said. "Perhaps some-a day your child vill be needing da help Mees Mattie and-a Blanche need-a now! What eef some-a day, when maybe thees precious Ursula has gone-a to the bad, in spite of her 'careful mother,' and all-a da street draw back from your child — who will go to her, and take-a your child in-a her arms and weep-a over her? Why, our Mees Mattie! She ees that-a kind of a vomans. But you! You can nevare spik to me again! If you do, I vill not-a spik back! So!"

And rearing her sleek black head majestically, Mrs. Shapiro sailed down the stairs, her breast heaving, her eyes flashing, and her long, golden earrings tinkling in her ears.

This partisan reproof confirmed Mrs. Waugh in her course, and in Vogelsang's Delicatessen she spoke her disapproval of Miss Mattie at every opportunity and to all who would listen.

It fell out naturally, therefore, that the Ferret, knowing the habits of Delicatessen patrons, heard the views of the inimical Mrs. Waugh, and a friendship sprang up between them which finally bore bitter fruit.

Kurt Vogelsang valiantly championed Miss Mattie, and it was through his indignant description of some words he overheard, that Maggie Connor learned of the Ferret's latest tunneling.

Miss Mostyn at first had no malicious intentions. She, a spinster, was frankly attracted to Matt McCabe, who appeared to be an unattached bachelor. Therefore she saw no reason why she should not seek to draw his attention to herself in any way she could.

She knew she was not particularly attractive in her working clothes, for she did not know how to dress, she stooped in her walk, and she invariably selected the wrong sort of stays, which accentuated her short waist and round back. But at night, when she got herself into a black net gown, with a red velvet ribbon in her black hair, she looked her best. Therefore it was an obsession with her to have Mr. McCabe attend one of her theater parties and see her in the evening.

MAGGIE CONNOR TAKES HER STAND 407

He had refused several times, but generally courteously—never with that air of finality which would make a woman of Miss Mostyn's predatory schemes turn to other quarry. So she continued to ask him.

After she discovered that he sometimes went to Miss Mattie's, her jealousy rose. She realized that Miss Mattie was at least as old as herself and, to her thinking, equally unattractive. She cast about, therefore, to discover what drew him there so often, and at last she thought of something which satisfied herself. Little by little, her suspicions grew, until with the advent of Blanche Terranova she mirrored forth the foulness of her own mind for all her world to see.

It chanced that she invited Mr. McCabe again, on the evening Maggie Connor had set for her supper party, so in refusing, Mr. McCabe very naturally gave the excuse that he had another engagement. And Mrs. Waugh, indignant at the demonstration, promptly informed Miss Mostyn what it was.

It was not difficult to learn all about the Connor supper party, but Maggie never dreamed what hate was brewing outside her brightly lighted shop, where the party took place. Instead, she had seldom enjoyed an evening more, for Mr. McCabe exerted himself to make the evening a success, and his treatment of each one in that

curious gathering—and especially of Blanche—caused everybody to admire him afresh.

He teased Gracie because her cat, Herbert, had surprised them by becoming the mother of five small, furry kittens, and he suggested changing Herbert's name to Mrs. Mabel Irene McGillicuddy to punish her for her deception. To please old auntie, he gave an imitation of himself and the City Editor in one of their battles. He tormented Bob Avery because Ursula Waugh telephoned him almost daily. He made Maggie blush by declaring he was going to open a Delicatessen in the immediate neighborhood and run everybody else out of the business. He scandalized Mrs. Galloway by telling her that he believed she was planning to marry again. He described the Blue Grotto and the Isle of Capri to Mrs. Shapiro is such exquisite language that she wept with homesickness and joy at his appreciation, and Miss Mattie kissed and comforted her and timidly reproached Mr. McCabe for urging his powers of description to such heights. And to Blanche and Joe he told stories of the farm, when he was a boy, that made the whole company shout with laughter.

Never had the lonely man had such an audience and such a rare opportunity to exploit his truly wonderful personality, rich, varied, and brilliantly clever. He was the life of the whole party, and

MAGGIE CONNOR TAKES HER STAND 409

Miss Mattie's eyes, as they rested on his face and beamed with innocent and adoring pride, told their story to the venomous Hate which stalked outside in the blackness of the night, where two jealous women watched the inhabitants of the light and formulated a scheme to cause their downfall.

But if the Red Dragon roved at large, St. Michael, his bright sword unsheathed, was ever at his heels, and the battle, when it came, was duel à la mort.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TRUANT OFFICER CALLS

I T WAS not a week later when Miss Mostyn called to try on hats.

Blanche went to wait on her, but Miss Mostyn asked for Miss Morningglory, who came when Blanche called her.

Miss Mattie, having completely forgotten Maggie's dark warnings in regard to this lady, welcomed her frankly and set about pleasing her with a hat she could not possibly resist buying.

Blanche, however, had anything but forgotten, and she hovered around, resolved to protect Miss Mattie if it lay in her power, for the girl, in spite of a violent temper, a disposition impatient of control and of a brooding jealousy which fed itself openly on the veriest trifles, had nevertheless developed for Miss Mattie a sort of fierce, protecting love, which resembled that of a stray dog that had been ill-treated by the world but had finally found a master to love and obey.

Since the Connor supper party, Blanche had watched her friend more closely than ever. Miss Mattie had talked less, had seemed more thoughtful, even verging on sadness, and Blanche nervously wondered why. She was afraid to ask,

and Miss Mattie did not explain. But the truth was that Miss Mattie had never had so good an opportunity to hear Mr. McCabe's excellent English spoken at length and without interruption, and for the first time she realized her own and her neighbors' lapses.

With Miss Mattie, to realize a mistake was to rectify it even though it was so great a task as a reconstruction of her entire method of speech. She thoughtfully considered the whole subject, and she finally came to the conclusion that great and pure thoughts, such as she was striving to live, could only be rendered perfect by translation into perfect language. She resolved to model her speech on Mr. McCabe's and never cease striving until her English was as pure as his.

With this conclusion came also a willingness to deny her selfishness with the children and make it easy for them to go to school, even if she had to take them herself. They would learn pure English there, and they too would then be able to speak as he would have them.

It was not easy for Miss Mattie to achieve this. It was done in the night watches, with tears of self-renunciation, and humbleness of spirit, but it chanced that the struggle had armed her for the interview with Miss Mostyn, and in a manner which admitted of no doubt as to whose the real victory would be.

With that discomfort the spiritually inarticulate always experience in the unaccustomed realm of mental achievement, Blanche, when she came that morning, recognized a strange something in the white wanness of Miss Mattie's face and the singular sweetness of her smile, yet her loyalty would not permit her to desert her post. She suspected a cataclysm to the extent of bringing her work into the salesroom in order to be near in case she was needed.

At first everything went on about as usual with a particular customer. Miss Mostyn objected to every hat Miss Mattie tried on, albeit some were unusually becoming. This fact set Blanche to wondering. She observed Miss Mostyn closely, and soon realized that she was nervous, and that she kept turning to watch the front door.

"She's expecting somebody!" said Blanche to herself. Presently the girl noticed that Mrs. Waugh passed on the street, looked in at the window a moment, and moved on, presently returning and again passing on.

"She's waiting for somebody!" again thought
Blanche.

It was an auspicious time. The children were all out, Gracie had taken Gloria in her go-cart, no one was in the back room, and only they three in the salesroom.

Presently in walked a man whose very appearance would cause the honest to shun him. His eyes were set near together and shifty in expression, his mouth was indented and hung in his face like a crescent moon, when it droops at both corners. His nose was hooked, and his complexion pasty.

Although Miss Mostyn did not greet the man, Blanche, watching her in the mirror, knew that she knew him, and from the servile look he threw her, Blanche suspected that he was in the woman's pay.

Miss Mattie turned to meet him.

"What can I do for you?" she asked, pleasantly. The man straightened himself.

"I'm the truant officer, ma'am," he said.

"Oh, yes," said Miss Mattie, "I'm sorry you had to come twice. I was out the first time you called."

"Miss Mattie," said Blanche clearly, "here is Mrs. Waugh. I expect she has come for Ursula's hat. Where is it?"

"No, I did n't come for no hat," began Mrs. Waugh quickly. "I came—"

Miss Mattie turned to the officer again, and Blanche, disregarding Mrs. Waugh's protest, opened a drawer and took out the young girl's hat.

"You ordered this, Mrs. Waugh," said Blanche innocently. "Don't you think it is pretty? See how it looks on me!"

"I came to tell you, ma'am," began the officer, and both Miss Mostyn and Mrs. Waugh frankly listened to what he was saying, "that you have two children here who are under sixteen years old and must go to school."

"I know it," said Miss Mattie calmly. "I've been getting them ready, and they can start in Monday and go anywhere you say!"

Miss Mattie did not plan this speech, nor intend it to overthrow her adversaries, but it had that effect.

Both ladies flushed. Miss Mostyn's hands clenched on the hat she held.

"You have been teaching them," snapped Mrs. Waugh, "and you are not a proper person to be teaching innocent children. You have brought—"

"I know I am not!" said Miss Mattie. "I realized that very plainly the other night after we came home from Maggie Connor's. I've done my best, but you see I never had many advantages and I am not competent to teach. Those children of mine are real smart and they need a good school, so I'm glad you just got at me and made me send them, because I'm so soft I reckon I'd have kept on trying to teach them myself if you had n't told this man to come."

Miss Mattie smiled at the officer, and his shifty gaze rested on Miss Mostyn's face.

"Where do you want them to go?" asked Miss Mattie.

"They'll have to go to Morningside School," said the truant officer; and Miss Mostyn unconsciously nodded her head.

"Very well," said Miss Mattie. "They can."

"Why, how can they?" asked Mrs. Waugh, amazed at the turn of affairs. "They can't go alone, can they?"

"I'll take them myself. It'll be real pleasant for me. I don't get enough exercise anyway, and with two long walks a day I can get better acquainted with the children than I've ever been. I'm looking forward to it with pleasure!"

"And who will tend shop for you!" cried Mrs. Waugh, losing caution as she saw that Miss Mattie's submission to the inevitable was robbing her of her anticipated scene.

"Why, Blanche will! She knows plenty now to run it for just the little time I'll be away. She's been real smart at picking up the business!"

"Do you expect much trade this spring?" asked Miss Mostyn, turning around and letting her latent hostility appear.

"Oh, yes," said Miss Mattie placidly, "I expect to get along about as usual, and that is all I want."

"You really need n't worry about working now, need you?" asked Miss Mostyn. "Since your income is assured, and since you and Miss Terranova both are in the same business—"

"I've never been so happy in my life," said Miss Mattie earnestly, "as since I knew that, no matter how the business goes, the children and I are provided for, and I never stop thanking my Heavenly Father that I've got a friend like—like the one you're referring to. I didn't know he'd told you, but I expect, being such a friend of yours, he's let you know. I don't mind a bit, because I'll bet it made you just as happy as it would have made me in your place, to know how the helplessness of three little children has been provided for. No woman with as kind a heart as you've got could help rejoicing with me."

Miss Mostyn lowered her eyes and bit her lip. "I have n't time to try on any more hats to-day," she said. "I'll come again."

She moved toward the door, and the other two followed her.

Miss Mattie smiled at them as they turned at the entrance, and she still smiled after they were gone, but in a rather absent way, as she went about putting away the hats that Miss Mostyn had tried on.

Blanche watched Miss Mattie in fascinated astonishment.

"Well?" The girl broke the silence with a word. Miss Mattie looked up, startled from her reverie.

"What say?"

"Ain't you got any remarks to make?" asked Blanche.

"What about?" asked Miss Mattie. "Oh, yes I have! I want to ask you. Did I hear Mrs. Waugh say she'd take that hat?"

Blanche opened her mouth to speak, and then laughed instead. She gave up, and answered Miss Mattie.

"Yes!" she cried. "I put it on and told her it would look even better on Ursula because her skin was so fair, and I asked her if I should send Gracie up with it. She hesitated a minute, then she said 'Yes'! And I'm goin' to do it before she gets time to change her mind!"

"She's a good woman at heart," declared Miss Mattie. "Do you know, I believe we were mistaken about what we thought. I don't believe there was a thing to it! Not a thing. She was as pleasant and friendly just now as I've ever seen her. Did n't you think so?"

Blanche stared at Miss Mattie, trying to fathom her thoughts. Was she too deep for words, the girl wondered, or just the sweetest woman God ever made?

the world other than that which had been dealt out to her, and that genuine kindliness and unselfish goodness gave more satisfaction than the tinsel she had worshiped and sacrificed for under the name of worldly pleasures.

On such evenings, when the children were asleep and before it was time for the girl to go up to her room, she and Miss Mattie would talk, and Miss Mattie would read the Bible to her and unlock it with her key, and Blanche, to her own surprise, would find herself listening.

Several days passed after the second visit of the truant officer. Then something happened. One morning Blanche received an anonymous letter, threatening her. It came to the shop, and Blanche read it before she took the rest of the letters into the workroom. There was one addressed to Miss Mattie which might be a mate to it, and for Miss Mattie to receive one, threatening her peace of mind because she had befriended herself, was more than Blanche could bear.

"Look like advertisements, Miss Mattie," she said, not offering to give them up, "shall I open them?"

"I was just goin'— going to ask you to," said Miss Mattie. Her mouth was full of pins, and her whole attention was centered on the facing of a flower toque, which looked like a brook in spring.

Blanche tore the letters open, one by one.

"First says 'Do you want your dog's blankets embroidered with your coat-of-arms?" No; because our dog's a cat! Next says 'May we press your husband's pants by the month?' Well, is n't that what you'd call a personal question? Next — Van Ness Realty Co. offers 'Large porch with small house attached for summer season at merely nominal rent.' Probably two thousand is what they'd call nominal. This one says 'Chickens hatched while you wait.' The Fordham Hatchery offers to demonstrate their new and improved incubator by sending an expert to your area door and hatching a batch of chickens on approval! I wonder would they send a man or a hen?"

Miss Mattie emptied the pins into her hand with a cough.

"I like to swallowed those pins — you made me laugh so!" she said. "Is n't advertising wonderful! Just think how many new kinds they get up every year! How does this look, Blanche? Come here and let me see if I've got these violets set flat enough. A thing does n't really begin to look pretty to me, till after you've tried it on. Then I see its possibilities and another idea for one just a little prettier grows in my mind! You don't realize what a help you are!"

Blanche glowed under the tenderness of Miss

Mattie's manner. She made no answer, but Miss Mattie saw her brimming eyes and little scarlet ear as she turned away.

For a few minutes, they discussed the scheme of matching flower muffs to these toques, then Blanche managed to get into the salesroom where she could read the anonymous letter she had discovered among the advertisements.

It was scurrilous, indecent, threatening, and plainly sent by the same hand that had written the one to Blanche.

The girl thrust both letters inside her blouse, and for the first time in her life she carried about with her all day an unselfish anxiety for another human being, and it marked in the soul of Blanche Terranova the birth of pure, self-sacrificing love.

Three days passed before she could decide what to do. And then one afternoon, just at dusk, Bob Avery, whose business it was to tend the gate which kept strangers from the editorial and advertising rooms, heard his name spoken by a young woman, heavily veiled, and Blanche Terranova was asking him for permission to speak to Mr. McCabe.

"I don't want any one to see me or know I'm here," whispered Blanche. "There's a woman here that hates Miss Mattie—"

"I get you!" answered Bob, alert at once. "And I'll fix it! It's just time for the Boss to

go home. Go on down to the street door and wait, and I'll tell him to meet you. I'll see that the Ferret does n't take the same elevator, if I have to trip her up."

He started away, then turned back.

"Say," he said, "I'm going to tell you something that I can't tell anybody else, but somebody ought to know it. It's this. If anything happens that the Ferret is in, remember what I'm saying. She's in love with the Boss, and he can't see it. And she's jealous of Miss Mattie. Are you on? Do you get me?"

Blanche's eyes snapped under her veil.

"Sure I do!" she whispered. "And it helps a lot,— things have already begun to happen, Bob. That's why I've got to see the Boss! Don't let him get away!"

The radiance of the boy's face and the suppressed eagerness of his manner impressed Mr. McCabe. He was not quite ready to go. Half a dozen small matters clamored for his attention, yet he felt himself yielding to Bob's urgent whispers.

"I'll go!" nodded Mr. McCabe. He rose quickly, shrugged himself into his overcoat, took his hat, and started. He looked back from the circular stairway and saw the boy still standing by the desk, his hands clenched, his figure tense with excitement, and his bright, earnest eyes glowing like live coals.

The man paused involuntarily. The boy was a study for a painter. Loyalty, intelligence, even mental brilliance were all there. Mr. McCabe smiled at him encouragingly, and went on.

"That boy," he said to himself, "will make a great editor some day. That is his ambition. And he will achieve it. Men and things! Men and things! Those are what he sees. He is always struggling to get them in their dramatic relation to each other—and then the individual focus on them! What a wonder he will be—if he is n't spoiled in the making! I am glad he knows Miss Mattie—and Gracie."

Occupied with these thoughts, he was jostled into the elevator and hurled down to the main floor.

It was just dark. The street lamps were being lighted and a dense fog was rolling in from the Sound. The sidewalks were sticky with slush. People crowded, and the dinner-quest was in the face of every one who pushed by him — an eagerness of the hour and of the city. At this time nothing is thought of in the length and breadth of Manhattan Island but food — where it may be had most conveniently or most cheaply or most expensively or most openly or most privately. And as Mr. McCabe saw the figure of the girl waiting for him, just beyond the

eddy which swirled around the doorway, this obsession swept over him also.

They did not speak. They only looked at each other. She turned, he fell into step beside her, and they walked on.

It was so inconspicuous a meeting that no one seemed to observe them, and in five minutes they were at an elevated station.

Blanche held back, almost imperceptibly. But the crowd behind hurried her on.

"I want to talk to you — only ten minutes will do!" she murmured as he bent down to listen. "Can't we walk along somewhere? Perhaps the station platform will do. I — I don't want to — to detain you!"

He read her wireless and shrugged.

"It is raw and cold. I am going to Ardin's to dine. Will you come with me? It is a charming little spot — the nearest to a thought of Paris that I know of. I have known M. Ardin for many years. He will see that we have a quiet table in a corner and that we are not disturbed. Come!"

The train thundered in, shaking the platform and stopping with a jerk which loosens rails, grates brakes, dislocates spines, snaps necks, bumps, jars, jolts, shocks, upsets, and grinds the nerves of more people annually than any form of torture known to a peregrinating public — with

the possible exception of a similar habit on the part of the elevated's subterranean sister. Yet protests are individual and never collective, and therefore get nowhere.

Swung completely around by the outpouring crowd, despite the strong arm of the man behind her, Blanche was finally propelled to the platform, where the two were wedged, unable to go either forward or back.

But fifteen minutes of this discomfort, and they were out of the crowd, threading a quiet side street, which grew, at every step, more quiet and tranquilizing in its effect upon jaded nerves.

Blanche felt, as instinctively as Miss Mattie had, that she was in the company of a man — a strong man — a big man — a man who knew how to weld adverse circumstances, compel them to do his bidding, and with a quiet strength about him upon which a woman's weakness might safely lean.

A short flight of brownstone steps let them into a brightly lighted front room, with one large transverse room back, both filled with small tables.

M. Ardin smiled and greeted them in French. Mr. McCabe replied, and added a word or two. Then they followed the proprietor, and at a table in the corner, quiet, inconspicuous, and immaculately clean, they were soon discussing an hors d'œuvre and a little dinner which was so dainty

and delicious and unlike anything Blanche ever had eaten before that the girl never forgot it.

She made no attempt to deliver herself of her message while dinner was being served. When she discovered that Mr. McCabe was taking her at Miss Mattie's valuation, a new and strange dignity descended upon her, and with that tact which is the heritage of many such girls, who never know whence it emanates, Blanche rested and let the man opposite rest, and allowed him to entertain her as no one knew better how to do than Matt McCabe when he tried.

And on this occasion he exerted himself. Odd and perverse as many a lion-hunting hostess had found him, there were times when he would not try — would not talk when flattering wires were touched which should have automatically galvanized him into charmed speech for vacuous diners to wonder and gape at. Yet to-night, for a girl at whom many would have shrugged, Matt McCabe drove back his weariness and brain-fag and exerted himself to charm her fears and her palpable anxieties, preparing to remove them when expressed, if not to shoulder them himself, should the necessity seem sufficiently exigent.

Presently a silence fell between them. Coffee had been brought, and the waiter had gone.

Then Mr. McCabe leaned forward, his folded arms on the table, and said:

"Well, Miss Terranova, what is it that troubles you?"

The girl started. Then she hesitated, as if uncertain how to begin.

"Is it anything about yourself?" questioned the man.

"No, oh, no!" she said quickly. "It is about Miss Mattie. I'm so worried about her! She is in danger — great danger — and she does n't know it, or even suspect it!"

Then Blanche, who was looking directly into Matt McCabe's face, saw a curious change take place there. His eyes, from being somber, slowly began to burn as if with inward fire. The color tinged first his prominent cheekbones, then spread until the red had animated his face from brow to chin.

"How do you know?" he said. His voice had a hoarse note in it, which was not there before.

For answer Blanche opened her shopping bag and drew forth the two letters. In silence, she handed them across the table.

"You wish me to read them?" he asked, holding them in his hand.

The girl nodded.

"You are sure?" he questioned again.

"You won't understand if you don't read them," answered Blanche. "The danger is there!"

A look of disgust swept over the man's face.

"Anonymous?" he asked, with an involuntary movement as if to hand them back.

"Yes," cried the girl eagerly, "but you must read them! They mention you, too, so you ought to know."

Reluctantly the man opened and read the two letters. He examined them carefully, then sat a few moments, lost in thought.

Finally he straightened himself.

"The same woman wrote them both — and I believe I know who it is!" he said. But still the distaste to touch and the reluctance to believe were in his voice.

Blanche saw, and grappled with his feeling.

"I knew you'd know," she said. "And I know how a gentleman like you would hate to mix in a nasty mess like this. But don't you see? It's for Miss Mattie I'm asking you! It's to help her! She's helped so many of us—it's on account of her helping me that she's being boycotted. She's worried about sending the children to school—"

"To school?" repeated the man. "What do you mean?"

"The truant officer came — or a man who said he was the truant officer — and said Miss Mattie had been reported!"

"Reported?" questioned Mr. McCabe. Blanche nodded toward the two letters.

"By the same woman that wrote them! Miss Mattie felt awful. She did n't say much, but she must have been up all night, for I wish you could have seen her face the next morning — so pale, and big circles under her eyes. But she never made any fuss — just got the children ready and the next time the man came, she — the creature that wrote the letters—and Mrs. Waugh were both in the shop, as if by accident, and when they heard Miss Mattie give in so sweetly and promise that the children could go, because she knew she did n't speak proper English and she wanted them to learn it, so that —"

"Stop!" cried the man. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. The girl could see that his hand was trembling.

"The sweetness of that woman—" he said, and paused. "Her humility is—heartbreaking. I—I wish you would n't tell me any more. I don't believe I can bear it. Pardon my abruptness, but I feel deeply on this subject of—of the children!"

"I know," acquiesced the girl. "I would n't have bothered you with it, except that I want somebody that's high up and got the power to come out strong and help her. And there was nobody I could think of but just you!"

"I'm glad you came to me, Miss Terranova. I will try to deserve your confidence!" said Mr.

McCabe, and lapsed again into a brown study. He was roused by the girl's voice:

"Of course I can't stay with her, Mr. McCabe. She's lost most of her customers, because they won't come where I am. She's game to stick it out! Miss Mattie would n't let me go, if she knew it, so I'm not going to tell her. I'll just finish up the last of the work I'm doing, because I know the things I'm making will start a craze, and then I'll slip away and not let her know where I'm going, or she'd be after me. She's come after me and brought me back more times than one. She's that kind!"

Tears and laughter both were in the girl's voice.

"You would leave her, knowing what anxiety she would suffer if you did?" questioned Mr. McCabe.

"I know she'll worry," admitted Blanche, "but I leave it to you! You're a man. You know what I am! And you know women. They never give such as me a chance! Miss Mattie's risked her good name — you see in those letters they're classing her with me, instead of me with her. And for her sake, and the children's, would n't it be better for me to slip back than for her to go down, trying to save me?"

"Slip back into your old life?" questioned the man.

The girl's face burned. She set her teeth and nodded, but he saw her shiver.

"There's nothing else for those who have been there!" she said in a low tone.

"Do you want to?" he persisted. "Does it tempt you? Are you just using this for an excuse? Tell me the truth!"

The girl raised her head.

"No!" she cried. "I hate it—now! I've learned to be—different. At first I thought I'd die of the dullness of Miss Mattie's. She did everything to hold me, and to make things homey and pleasant. But God! After the life I'd lived the very air of those rooms seemed to choke me! It was too pure, after what I'd been through! So I ran away—ever so many times—and gave Miss Mattie lots o' trouble an' worry!"

"How came you back?" asked the man. "For you always did come back!"

"I come back 'cause Miss Mattie came after me!" cried Blanche. "Somehow, she always got on to where I was. Once she caught me at the door of a restaurant,—all in, and going to Albany on the night train. Well—I did n't go. Miss Mattie just put her arms around me—they said afterwards I tried to hit her—I don't know!—but anyhow she brought me home in a taxi, and sat up with me all night. That tamed me. I've never even wanted to do such things

since. Then she began to teach me and to love me. I'd never seen anybody like her before. She treated me just as she treats her other friends and her customers. So do Mrs. Galloway and Mrs. Shapiro and the Connors. You saw, that night! And I've got so I like it. I don't say I'm all over liking to run around, and hear music, and dance! No, I'm not! But I'm done with the other—for always—unless there's no other way!"

"Blanche," said the man, "what does Miss Mattie say about green pastures?"

The girl's head went down suddenly and she sobbed.

"I know! She says there's a place prepared for me—somewhere! But I don't know where it is. I can't find it by myself. And I can't tell her."

The man's hand reached out and clasped hers.

"Listen!" he said. "Do you know the meaning of your name?"

The girl raised her head and looked at him.

"No," she said.

"Blanche means white — pure. Terranova means new earth — a new world. Therefore, baptized by the translation of your name, with a purity you have earned and learned from the most unselfish woman God ever made, you can look for a new world to open beneath your feet. And courage! I think I can give it to you!"

"You?" cried the girl. "A new earth? A chance to begin over?"

"Listen, Blanche Terranova! Can you make hats as well as Miss Mattie?"

"Well," she hesitated, "I could n't say that. For Miss Mattie is a genius. But — I — I — well, if I had the chance to make a name for myself, where nobody knew me, I'd die trying!"

"Good!" exclaimed the man. "You shall have your chance! In the town which is only a few miles from my farm there is but one milliner—an old lady who has been the sole authority on styles for forty years. She wishes to sell out and wrote asking me to find a purchaser. I will buy her business and put you in her place. That shall be your new world, and conquer it you surely will—from what I have learned of you this night."

"Oh, Mr. McCabe!" was all the girl could say. But her face, her quick breathing, her clenched hands, told the story.

"And as for these letters and Miss Mattie — I have a plan for her also."

"To save her?" questioned Blanche.

Matt McCabe nodded.

"A new earth for her also — and the children!" he said, with an expression on his face which made Blanche look at him in wonder.

"Green pastures" she whispered. "She

always said they were there, but I did n't believe her! Oh, what will she say when she hears I'm to have a shop of my own!"

"It will take you away from her and leave her again alone," said the man, "but she will never give herself or her own necessities a thought in the way she will unselfishly rejoice with you!"

His voice went a trifle unsteady, but he cleared it roughly and with a frown drank some water.

The girl's face glowed.

"She will! That's just her!" she said. "It makes me so mad to see all the beautiful hats she's made for Easter, and hardly a soul coming even to look! Why, Mr. McCabe, we've worked out a scheme of hats and flower muffs to match that, if it was only advertised in some way, would start a craze that would make Miss Mattie as famous as any Fifth Avenue milliner that walks!"

At the word advertised, Matt McCabe leaned forward and narrowed his gray eyes. A lock of his thick black hair fell over his forehead.

"Tell me about it," he said tersely.

Then Blanche unfolded to him the idea of the flower toques and the exquisite pastel satins and accordion-plaited chiffons which combined with the flowers to make the muffs. And their beauty lost nothing in the telling.

"It sounds as if they would be beautiful — on the stage!" said the man who listened.

"That's what I meant when I said if they could have the right advertising," cried Blanche. "Now Miss Mattie had a customer—Miss Cornie Cornelius. She's at the Promenade Theatre, and she's being featured. In one song she wears a hat we sold her, so that shows you! Now, if Miss Mattie could get her to use one of these muffs and flower toques on the stage—just one night! I wrote her a note asking her to call and see our models, but she never came, nor even answered it."

Blanche paused. Her clasped hands were eloquent.

"I know the manager of that show," said Mr. McCabe slowly. "Now you do your part and I'll do mine. For once I'll be a stage Johnny! I will send Miss Cornie Cornelius a present of your prettiest flower hat and muff, with a note asking her to wear them in her new song. Then you select them and take them to her dressing room after the matinée to-morrow. To-morrow night I will give a box party. I'll invite the Fashion Editor of our paper, the Society Editor, and the writer of these letters. I will send the Fashion Editor behind the scenes to interview Miss Cornelius and write up the flower muffs. After that I'll interview the manager of the piece!"

"You'll — you'll invite the woman that wrote them?" asked Blanche, in a horrified voice.

Matt McCabe smiled grimly.

"If I were a judge," he said, "I would class malicious gossip with smallpox and leprosy, and segregate women — and men — who indulged in it. Or else brand them with the fleur-de-lis as they used to brand certain criminals in France. Women have murdered other women by their foul tongues, which showed forth the filth of their own minds, and gone scot free. You know that. I am backing my friend, Miss Mattie Morningglory, who is suffering from a boycott of women because she has bravely rescued and befriended a sister-woman who needed her help. I owe this—lady some entertainment: she has invited me many times, but I always declined. Now I will return her courtesy, and if my plans mature and the name of Miss Mattie Morningglory gains new luster, this—lady, who has fouled my friend's fair name in these vile letters, shall be there to see! Indeed, I propose to make this noisome pestilence contribute to her own undoing! Come! We have no time to lose! I have greatly enjoyed your company, and I thank you for coming."

They went out through the now empty rooms, and at the foot of the steps stood a taxi waiting, evidently ordered.

Mr. McCabe handed Blanche Terranova, erstwhile girl of the streets, into the vehicle with the air of a grand duke, raised his hat, and walked briskly eastward to the elevated.

CHAPTER XXIX

PSALMS 76:10

ON HIS way back to the office, Matt McCabe dropped in at the Promenade Theatre and heard Miss Cornie Cornelius sing her new song.

Now the advertising manager of the Star was a man of close observation. He never went anywhere nor did anything without being able to precipitate himself into the heart of it. So when he saw this young woman he listened to her really beautiful voice. He watched her expressive dancing. He saw Miss Mattie's hat on her exceedingly pretty head, and he at once began to play up to the situation.

It was impossible for him to avoid seeing the faults and the possibilities of a thing like this girl's act. His mind flew at it and grappled with it in spite of himself. It was the way he did everything — solved every problem — either for himself or for a friend.

The song was catchy, and Matt McCabe whistled it as he sat at his desk an hour later. It was about a foolish little brook that fell in love with a calm and indifferent lake and died of love therefor, and it had a curious lilt in the chorus which lingered in the memory, simply

because there was no end to it, or rather the end ran into the beginning again. The song seemed to flow, and the picture of the girl singing it stayed in the man's mind. His brain was struggling for an idea. Of what did it remind him?

Suddenly he struck the desk with the flat of his hand, and a slow smile overspread his countenance.

He drew the telephone toward him and called his friend, the manager of the show. After the short preliminaries, he said:

"Say, you've got the makings of a hit there in your Miss Cornie Cornelius, but it does n't quite get over! What? Well, maybe I can help you out. I believe I know just what's wrong with it. Will you stand me a dinner if I'll tell you? Surest thing you know. The interview goes. Better prepare the young lady! So long!"

Then he wrote a note to Blanche, and typewrote the address on the envelope. In it he said:

"If you have n't any muff and hat made of pond lilies, make some before noon and get them to the girl. Don't fail in this on any account. Much depends upon it."

Then he plastered the envelope with two-cent stamps and sent it special delivery.

About eleven o'clock at night the office of the Star began to wake up. Grand opera was in full swing and a new work, never before presented in America, had been produced that evening, so

the girls Matt McCabe proposed to invite to his box party would be obliged to get their stuff in before midnight.

He had never invited them before, and he grinned as he pictured their surprise. The mysterious wife he purposely alluded to now and then had kept all of them at bay except the most predatory. Miss Mostyn frankly builded on the hope that she—the wife—was either dead or divorced.

"I ought to have a bottle of smelling salts handy!" McCabe said to himself.

The girls trooped in together — Miss O'Gorman, who did fashions so that even the intelligent could enjoy reading her snappy descriptions and the sly fun she poked at indecent extremes; and Miss Bixby, who was really married and worth her weight, which was considerable, in gold to the Star because she possessed, as the City Editor said in a tone of respectful awe, "a gall so impervious that she could get into a funeral and interview the corpse, and if thrown out bodily would think it an accident, and never know she had been ejected." Miss Mostyn, who dyed her hair, valuable chiefly as a descriptive writer, trailed in their wake. All three were radiant at having live stuff to They flung themselves down before their respective typewriters, which began to click vociferously. It was at this moment that the grim and forbidding Advertising Manager elected to pause before their desks and put his invitation squarely up to them.

The three typewriters stopped simultaneously. Three green shades on three swinging bulbs shed pallid lights on three incredulous faces. And in three keys of unbelief, three feminine voices asked him what he said.

After he had repeated his invitation and walked away, with a smile of huge enjoyment on his face, which they could not see, he reflected with grim humor that the typewriters had not again begun to click even when he reached the dividing door.

He shot a furtive glance back at them, and almost laughed aloud as he saw that all three were still staring after him in speechless amazement.

Nevertheless they accepted and, without confessing it either to themselves or to each other, were flattered by the invitation to the extent that they wore their best to do him honor.

He could see that they suspected him. Of what, they did not know. But something, they felt sure, was at the bottom of this sudden friend-liness from a man who hitherto had held rigorously aloof from all the women in the office. He could also see that they proposed to find out what, in the vernacular, his game was.

Now Mr. McCabe, while the admitting almost

supernatural intuitive cleverness of women, flattered himself that men likewise possess a modicum of brains. On this occasion three women, accustomed to the newspaper game, pitted their suspicion and their wits against him. And he was only a man.

He took them to dinner first, and showed them what the Knickerbocker can do when it tries.

When they came out, at half-past nine, to find a limousine waiting, they were mellowed and softened and perfectly convinced that his frank declaration of being about to quit the paper was the only real and authentic reason for his farewell entertainment of them.

When they reached their box, there was still half an hour of entertainment before Miss Cornelius would sing. And each number Mr. McCabe picked to pieces, praised, ridiculed, and discussed in all its bearings.

Then came the song of the brook which ran, singing its love song to the indifferent lake, and Miss Cornelius, garbed in green satin covered with silver net, crowned with pond lilies, and carrying the muff to match, drifted up stage and began to sing.

Mr. McCabe folded his arms and leaned back. Miss O'Gorman leaned forward. Then Miss Cornelius danced. With that dance the genius of Blanche Terranova got over, for as the dancer moved, the double accordion-plaited chiffon from both ends of the big muff swirled, now above her head like a snowstorm, now around her feet as she stooped and bent and drifted and floated, even as the sighing brook, between its cool green banks, down to its love, the lake.

It was a picture dance, full of color and poetry and grace. Yet lacking. What?

When the song was over they recalled her, three, four, five times. And she danced until she was breathless, and then came forward, throwing kisses to the audience.

The girls clapped enthusiastically. Mr. Mc-Cabe studied his program. He had applauded at first, and then stopped — which always irritates a woman who has not had enough of a number and has no way of noisy applause.

"Did you like it?" asked Miss Bixby.

"As well as I like to see anything half done!" answered the man, indifferently.

"Half done!" echoed Miss Mostyn. "Why, it is the only thing to-night that has been in the least bit different!"

Mr. McCabe bent toward Miss O'Gorman.

"Tell me! Where did she get her idea? Let me see if you know. They say the song was written for her."

Miss O'Gorman, flattered, colored slightly and turned away.

"It reminds me, vaguely, of something I have seen — in some play — some beautiful — symbolic play —" she stopped, groping after her elusive thought. Mr. McCabe's deepset eyes were bent encouragingly on hers. He smiled slightly.

Suddenly the thought was captured.

"I have it!" she cried, clapping her hands. "She got her idea from 'Water' in The Bluebird!"

Mr. McCabe nodded his head, commending her without a word. But his manner expressed a respectful admiration which spurred her on.

"But she must be clever to have designed that costume. That flower toque and muff are touches of genius."

Matt McCabe's eyes were fixed on his program.

"Still," he said, running his hand through his hair in an impatient way, "I feel something lacking. I am no psychologist. Tell me, you young women, what's the *matter* with that song? Suppose the manager came to you and said, 'That act gets only five recalls. It ought to be good for ten. How can I improve it?' What would you say?"

The three women leaned forward as if pulled by one string. Nothing is such subtle flattery to a woman of brains as to have a clever man ask her how a play or a story could be remodeled so as to make more of a hit. "Well," said Miss O'Gorman, "she dances in a short skirt. She ought to be dragging about two yards of that green satin and silver gauze after her on the floor! She's a brook, you know."

Matt McCabe narrowed his eyes.

"Excellent!" he said. But his tone was still inquiring.

"Then," said Miss O'Gorman — she paused. "I know! She ought to have a chorus of pretty girls —"

"Ah!" said Matt McCabe, sitting up. "Go on!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "Now, you've hit it! A chorus—"

"Beginning with tall girls and running down to little ones — all dressed in varying shades of green and white and silver —" went on Miss O'Gorman, sparkling with interest.

"All with flower toques and muffs!" cried Miss Mostyn, jealous of Mr. McCabe's interested manner.

The man turned to her courteously.

"Exactly, Miss Mostyn!" he said. "Why, what you young ladies have just said would be worth its weight in gold to the manager. I wish he might have heard it!"

Miss O'Gorman's eyes snapped.

"Mr. McCabe," she begged, "let me have it! I'll go behind the scenes and talk to Miss Cornelius, and tell her what she ought to do—"

"Yes, but will the manager—" began Mr. McCabe.

"Why not bring the manager here to the box and tell him?" suggested Miss Mostyn, with an eye on future boxes if she could meet him.

"Why not do both?" spoke up Miss Bixby. "Madge, you go get an interview for the Sunday paper, and have Sam Messer make the pictures for you. The Boss will feature it. Then Mr. McCabe — and that's the beauty of being a man! You can go out and do things!— you go chase the manager in here and we'll do the rest."

"The idea of the chorus with the flower toques and muffs to match hers was mine!" interrupted Miss Mostyn.

Matt McCabe turned to her, his eyes twinkling.

"Mind you hang on to it, Miss Mostyn. If I can find the manager, you hammer it into him! Don't you let these girls steal your scene!"

Then they sent him out. And he brought back a manager with a box-office grouch, whose forbidding looks almost strangled their speech. He chewed gum viciously while they haltingly began to talk, and at first would not even look at them. But as they unfolded their scheme his eyes woke up. He turned to Matt McCabe, and slowly winked.

"You're on!" he said. "These girls own the house. Your visiting card, at any time, ladies!

Miss O'Gorman, if you will come with me I'll see if Miss Cornelius is still in her dressing room."

Matt McCabe rose, and stepped out into the aisle back of the box to let him pass. The manager shifted his chewing gum to the other side as he whispered: "She's holding her breath for fear we won't come! The dinner goes, Matt. Your idear's great! Now, Miss O'Gorman!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN AT THE BOX PARTY

THE Sunday paper devoted a page in the Magazine Supplement to the new dancer, and three thousand words of Miss O'Gorman's snappiest stuff was scalloped around the edges of five of Sam Messer's best impressionist pictures of Miss Cornelius. The next night there was such a crush at the Promenade Theatre that Leopold, the disgusted manager of the Blue Circle, always declared he owed the frost his new piece suffered to "Mohler's infernal featuring of a broiler," which emptied Leopold's theatre at ten o'clock like a cry of "Fire!"

At nine-thirty Max Mohler, manager of the Promenade, began to smile, as men and women in evening dress, from dinners and even from other theatres, began to crowd in. At ten he was rubbing his hands and exchanging pleasantries with the box office. At ten-thirty, when Miss Cornie Cornelius drifted on the stage, there was scarcely standing room, and Mohler was offering cigars to the scene shifters. The Promenade was a new theatre, and this was its first real hit.

For a hit it was—the song and dance, and chorus. Miss Cornelius, as the head of the brook,

led her chorus of pretty girls around and around, behind great gray rocks, through beds of ferns, by a green meadow bright with spring flowers, until it reached its lake, bordered with purple flags and dotted with green lily pads. Into this calm and indifferent lake the little brook, gay with its green and silver, plunged and sank. Then without a sound the pond-lily crowns drifted slowly until each was caught and held in the embrace of a green lily pad, whereupon an echo of the sad little song of the dead brook floated out into the air.

It was a dangerous experiment, for the least mishap would have turned it into caricature. But it happened to be well done. It also happened to catch by the throat the case-hardened audience, whose ridicule was nearer the surface than their approval.

There was that moment of hush, before the applause, that every manager loves. It means the real thing — genuine emotion — and genuine emotion means business.

Miss Cornelius herself, and her brook, never forgot that night. She had her recalls — in her excitement, more than she could remember, but each one was registered automatically by the manager's brain, because at each recall the girl's salary rose by leaps and bounds. And meet her wildest demands he must, for before the end of

the week, if this run continued, she could choose her manager and break contracts at will. This last denotes the high-water mark of popularity with any star.

Matt McCabe was there—alone. When it was over, he touched the arm of the manager, who was standing near, chewing gum more industriously than ever. Mohler chewed gum as other men smoked—from nervousness. And the movement of his jaw, from allegro to andante or from piano to fortissimo betrayed the state of his mind—and often of his temper.

"On all programs hereafter, beginning tomorrow," said Mr. McCabe, "I want you to insert a line running, 'Flower toques and muffs used by Miss Cornie Cornelius in her famous Brook Song, made by Miss Mattie Morningglory!"

Max Mohler struck hands with the Advertising Manager. Indeed, such was the unctuousness of the gentleman of the chewing gum, that if Mr. McCabe had asked anything short of a share in the proceeds he would have got it.

The papers next morning faithfully recorded the triumph. Blanche raced out before breakfast to get them, and reached the shop while the children were still washing the dishes. She read the extracts aloud to Miss Mattie, who stood as if petrified, listening.

It was excellently written up in the Star, and both Miss Mattie and Blanche were swallowing hard when the girl finished.

"My land!" said Miss Mattie, dabbing her eyes with her pocket handkerchief. "It's funny that just a description of a lot of girls disappearing through a trap door and landing on a mattress could seem so like a real love affair that it makes us cry. I wish I could see Cornie in that act. I'll bet she can do it just like it says."

Blanche looked at her in amazement.

"Is that all you're thinking of!" she cried. "I'm thinking of those toques and muffs floating to the lily pads and sticking there! And I'm thinking that it won't be an hour till some of those other girls will be in here asking for flower muffs to wear to the Plaza to tea this very afternoon. There's the telephone now! Let me go!"

It was not a customer, however. It was Mr. McCabe, and he threw the entire shop into spasms of delight by saying that he had reserved a box for that night and he placed it at Miss Mattie's disposal. He only insisted however, that she must bring Blanche and the children, Gracie and Joe.

The children promptly went wild. They had listened with open mouths to Blanche when she was reading about the dance, and now to think they were going to see it!

In the midst of the pandemonium their excitement caused, Blanche came and put her arms around Miss Mattie's neck.

"I don't want you to hurt me by urging me to go," she said. "I can't do it. I just could n't sit there in a box with you and the children. But if you'll go, I'll get a couple of tickets and take Mrs. Galloway's old auntie. I'll get a taxi and give her the time of her life!"

Miss Mattie opened her lips to demur, but she changed her mind. She kissed Blanche instead.

"Do it, dear!" was all she said. But Blanche looked into Miss Mattie's eyes and was satisfied, for Miss Mattie knew that this was, in all probability, the first time in all her selfish, frivolous life, that Blanche Terranova had done a thing solely to give another pleasure, and that other a forlorn old woman to whom pleasures were few. So Miss Mattie recognized the flowering of the planted and watered seed, and was wise enough to let its fragrance alone.

The box held eight, and by noon Miss Mattie's party was made up, consisting of the Connors and Mrs. Galloway, Mrs. Shapiro, and Mrs. Meyer. And she telephoned Mr. McCabe to that effect. He replied that his party would consist of himself and Bob Avery, and that all of them were invited to be his guests in a private dining room after the performance.

By the words "private dining room" Miss Mattie knew that Blanche would be expected, and she realized that Blanche, too, was beginning to receive her Answers.

Miss Mattie did not in the least realize how she was being talked about — for the pure in heart see God in even their traducers and are thereby rescued from the scourge of tongues. So naturally she did not suspect the bristling loyalty of her friends. Nor would she have approved had she known that Mrs. Waugh was visited four times that day by four triumphant neighbor-women, each of whom casually informed her of the theatre party that night with the supper afterward, "with Blanche invited just like the rest of us by a Christian!" Mrs. Waugh nearly sobbed with anger and chagrin, for she thriftily realized that she and Ursula might have been included had her net been cast on the right side. When the helpless traduced begin to be raised up in power as a reward for their meekness, the slanderers are wisely led to see the fulfillment of that specific promise of the Father to avenge his elect speedily.

Mr. McCabe, to whom Miss Mattie communicated Blanche's sacrifice, offered to get the tickets for her, well knowing that the house was sold out, the "Standing Room Only" sign having been displayed since noon. But he told the

box office that the first two returned seats were to be his, and that he would be on hand to get them.

It is worth recording, because it marked an epoch in Matt McCabe's life, that he went without his dinner in order to get those tickets. He was detained so late at the office that he had barely time to dress. Tickets generally begin to be returned anywhere from six o'clock on. But at half past seven the box-office man reported that not a thing had come in.

Mr. McCabe sought the manager.

"See here!" he said. "I've been a good friend of yours. I want two tickets to-night even if it costs your scalp. Understand? You go and get me two seats!"

Mohler gave the gray eyes a quick look, and nodded. In ten minutes he was back.

"Here you are!" he said tersely. "A man was just offering four bones apiece for 'em, when I grabbed 'em! Go on! They're yours for a smile! Did n't you work up this piece? Sure you did! I'm sorry the seats are upstairs, but they're front row!"

"All the better!" declared Mr. McCabe. "Come round to the office when you want to renew your contract."

The manager grinned.

"You're on!" he said heartily.

Thus it was that old auntie could look directly

down on the heads of the party in the box. It excited her to see that Mr. McCabe and Bob Avery had to stand.

"Why don't some o' them young people git up an' give Mr. McCabe a seat?" she demanded in a shrill whisper. "Don't they know who he is? Huh?"

Blanche soothed her with an explanation and then gave herself up to the enjoyment of the old lady. Old auntie had never been in such a theatre in her life. Her eyes snapped fire, her toothless gums chewed incessantly on invisible food, her little wrinkled brown claws, in black lace mitts, were not still a moment. Blanche was nervously conscious of a good deal of scrutiny, but balcony audiences are so odd that no further notice was taken of the two after the numbers began.

Old auntie danced a little in her seat when Mrs. Galloway turned and waved her program at the two.

"There they are! They see us!" she mumbled. "I see Gracie, too. She's a good little girl. I ain't goin' to pull her cat's tail — never again!" "Of course not!" said Blanche, laughing.

The party of eight crowded the box, for the seats were small and Mrs. Galloway billowed over the edge of hers and unconsciously took up more than her share of room. The two children



were placed in front, next the Connors and Mrs. Meyer, all being small, while Mrs. Galloway and Mrs. Shapiro sat in the third tier of chairs. Miss Mattie was in the rear of all, but by dodging she managed to see. Miss Mattie was used to dodging Mrs. Galloway.

On this occasion she was glad to sit back. It gave her such a splendid view, not only of her own party and their intense excitement and pleasure, but she could also see the entire house — two faces in the front row of the balcony and two other faces among those standing.

Long before Cornie Cornelius came on, Miss Mattie leaned back, sated with pleasure and gratitude. Were there ever, she thought, such wonderful friends anywhere in the world as she possessed? Her eyes brimmed with tears as she ran over, in her mind, the list of her blessings, beginning with Gloria and ending with Blanche and old auntie.

The prediction of Blanche had come true, and half a dozen flower muffs had been sold that very afternoon.

At ten o'clock, the already full theatre began to pack. Every one roused himself, and there was that tense feeling among the audience which comes in certain plays before what is called "the big scene."

At half-past ten the lights went up to their



THE BOX PARTY

457

greatest brilliance — a simple stage trick, but one which always produces its effect. Everybody sat forward.

Suddenly Miss Mattie turned pale and gave a little cry. She had just discovered her name on the program, as the maker of the muffs. Her friends looked around, and she pointed with her finger.

Mrs. Galloway reached over and took Miss Mattie's program, as if her own did not contain the wonderful line. Immediately she searched her own. Then she sat up and pulled her chair in between the Connors' and the children's, entirely unconscious that she was crowding them. Her bosom heaved and creaked in her tight black silk dress. Her red cheeks sagged, but she sat well forward, fanning herself, with conscious pride that every one in the audience had read that line and knew that she, Mrs. Amanda Galloway, was seated in the box with the now distinguished milliner, Miss Mattie Morningglory.

Then came a hush, and Cornie Cornelius, with her sweet, inquiring face, pretty with that plaintive prettiness of extreme youth, extreme slimness, and extreme innocence which gets a New York audience by the throat as no other type on earth has power to do, floated onto the stage, as light as a thistledown and as delicate as a moth. The violins and flutes began to ripple and trill. The

girl lifted her chin, exposing the delicacy of her white throat, and sang.

Her song cannot be described. There are no words. It was one of those things which seem to circle the world in a day and then die as quickly as they come. Old timers hailed Miss Cornelius as a second Edna May, and described the first time that now-famous demureness captured audiences as Cornie Cornelius was capturing this. And in the meantime the brook was singing and Cornie and her girls were dancing and weaving in and out of the greens and blues and purples of the stage, the song growing fainter • and fainter as the brook rippled up stage. Then, with a little interpolated cry, which she did not use the first night but which came naturally, the brook plunged to her death on the indifferent bosom of the lake.

As the pond lilies floated and were caught and held in tardy appreciation by the green lily pads, and the forlorn echo of the dead brook's song stole out plaintively, the audience bravely applauded. But Mrs. Galloway reached into her pocket, took out her carefully folded hand-kerchief, and frankly wiped away the tears which were making furrows in the powder on her face.

"My land," she ejaculated, thickly, "I don't think them tragic things ought to be allowed on the stage. They harrer up the feelin's so!"



THE BOX PARTY

Then she looked around and smiled.

"But the aujence seems to like it!" she said. "They'll about kill them girls, if they don't let 'em stop soon!"

"Sure, I'll bet if Cornie's mother wanted her to work half that hard runnin' a washin' machine, or chasin' herself to th' grocery fer eggs, she'd put up a howl that her young legs was n't sthrong enough for such arjoos jooties!" said Maggie Connor, with a nervous laugh that had a sniff of tears in it.

On the way out, the party became separated by the crowd. Mr. McCabe had instructed them to go out the side door, where he had two automobiles waiting. Miss Mattie, her mind on other things, turned the wrong way and suddenly realized that she was lost. Hastily she retraced her steps, only to be caught and hemmed in by the crowd. She knew she would be sought for, so she simply stood still.

Wedged in by the throng, her attention was attracted by the mention of Mr. McCabe's name. Two persons, a man and a woman in evening dress, standing so close they crowded her when they tried to move, evidently saw him, for the man said, "There's Matt McCabe now!"

The woman craned her neck.

"Where? Where?"

"That tall man going down the street. See?"

"Why, what's he doing?"

"By Jove! He picked a little, curious-looking old woman up in his arms and carried her to that limousine! If that is n't just like Matt!"

"Is he odd?" asked the woman, with a shrug.
"I hate men who are odd, and wilfully eccentric!
People talk about them so!"

"Sour grapes!" laughed the man. "You tried hard enough to get him to come to your dinner."

"Oh, yes," grudged the woman, "when you said he was cultivated and fascinating!"

"And rich!" jeered the man.

"He's distinguished looking!" parried the woman. "Is he a widower or a bachelor?"

"Neither!" answered the man. "Wife's insane or something. She's never seen with him, but he is known to have one. Speaks of her now and then—"

"Look out! Here he comes!"

They looked confused when Mr. McCabe extricated Miss Mattie and led her away. She saw him take off his hat to the couple, but she said nothing, and he rallied her on her silence.

"Are you tired, dear friend?" he asked solicitously, bending down to look into her face. She shook her head.

"Just a little confused," she said.

He drew her hand under his arm and they walked, a tall, striking couple, to the limousine.

CHAPTER XXXI

OLD AUNTIE LOVES HER NEIGHBOR AS HERSELF

THE private dining room proved to be on the main floor of a handsome white and gold palace, whose brilliancy and glitter literally took the breath of the little party.

If he had been entertaining ambassadors of foreign countries, Mr. McCabe could not have done it more lavishly. But enwrapped in all the thought he had given it had been the recollection of Miss Mattie's meek sacrifice of her children's society. This sweet submission in the gentlest woman he had ever known was, he well knew, that they might all learn to speak their English more correctly — more as he himself spoke it. Miss Mattie's frank admiration caused him to groan within himself, realizing as he did the height of her superiority to him in the possession of those eternal verities which are the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Whimsically he remembered his promise to her of a gold throne, as he led her into the brilliancy of this ivory and gold room.

A maid took their wraps in a silence which was oppressive. Gracie was the only one who was



completely at her ease. The two boys were selfconscious, Mr. McCabe slightly nervous, but the women seemed paralyzed.

Mr. McCabe paid no attention to their silence, but talked rapidly, first to one and then the other.

As he seated them, Miss Mattie was on his right and old auntie on his left. But only Maggie Connor, who often dressed ladies' hair for grand affairs and had picked up bits of such knowledge, realized the significance of this arrangement.

At each place was a bunch of violets. Miss Mattie's violets were white, and her bunch was twice as large as that of any of the others. And again, only Maggie Connor comprehended the distinction.

Mrs. Shapiro, Mrs. Meyer, and Mrs. Galloway soon rose to the occasion. Mr. McCabe's tact quickly put them at their ease, and in half an hour the party were chattering as cheerfully in their ivory and golden splendor as when gathered around Miss Mattie's white oilcloth.

Only Miss Mattie could not rouse herself. It seemed as if the fragment of conversation she had overheard had plucked her friend out of her ken and put him back into his proper place in the world. Great ladies, with bare shoulders and ropes of pearls, were angling for his presence at their gorgeous dinners, and this knowledge



OLD AUNTIE LOVES HER NEIGHBOR 463

reminded her that his attraction to her and her children was merely an episode which might close at any moment.

What would the world seem like if he, with all his power and charm and magnetic lovableness, should suddenly be eliminated — snatched away! What if the time came when she knew she would never see him again!

He bent toward her.

"Are you ill, Miss Mattie?" he demanded, with anxious emphasis.

The voice of Mrs. Galloway startled them.

"She's et even the bones!"

Everybody looked up. Mrs. Galloway pointed excitedly at old auntie's plate. Her cold roast quail was gone. On every other plate was a little heap of bones, but old auntie's was swept bare.

"What hev you done with 'em?" demanded Mrs. Galloway.

Two waiters came forward hurriedly. With a lift of his eyebrows, Mr. McCabe ordered them from the room.

Old auntie began to dance in her chair. She shut her loose mouth, and mumbled. Not a word would she say.

"Les's look under the table!" said Mrs. Galloway. "Did you throw 'em away, Auntie?"

The old woman shook her head.

"It's all right even if she did!" declared Mr.



McCabe. "She can throw them out of the window or at Bob's head, for all I care! I invited you here to have a good time, so go on and have it. Break the dishes if you want to!"

A gale of laughter greeted this speech, but Mrs. Galloway was not pacified. Every few minutes she reached over and felt of old auntie's sleeves, as if she suspected her of hiding the roast bird there; or else she stooped and looked under the lace tablecloth. Once, when a waiter was trying to serve her with salad dressing, she whirled suddenly around and looked on the floor behind old auntie's chair, and only the trained agility of the Frenchman saved Mrs. Galloway's best black taffeta from utter ruin.

Old auntie ate the remainder of her supper without mishap, albeit under strict surveillance from the neighbor-women. She wore a brown cashmere gown of ancient pattern, with a deep lace collar Miss Mattie had lent her. Her thin white hair was drawn smoothly back from a face which had so changed in expression since the twelve bottles of stomach bitters, or some equally potent healing remedy, had been applied, that one would hardly have recognized the old vixen who had once so severely tried Mrs. Galloway's patience.

Under usual circumstances Mr. McCabe might have been worried by his chief guest's silence and preoccupation, but he was so absorbed in thoughts

OLD AUNTIE LOVES HER NEIGHBOR 465

and ever-widening plans of his own that he ignored what he felt to be only temporary depression caused by fatigue.

For Miss Mattie was tired. She had taken the children to the Morningside School that day and spent a weary hour being questioned and interviewed by the principal and teachers, to the end that they not only permitted her to take the children home as unfit for school work, but frankly questioned the authority—even the identity—of the truant officer.

Ordinarily Miss Mattie would have rejoiced at this decision and accepted it as one of her Answers. But something must be the matter with her. She thought she felt a mental numbness, as if the power to enjoy life were being taken away from her by invisible means.

Even the fairy supper, which once would have roused her to a pitch of enthusiasm that would have lasted a week, failed to move her to more than a detached interest, as if it all belonged to a dream which was hastening with flying feet to a blank awakening.

Not so the others. Led by Mr. McCabe's droll example, conversation became more and more unembarrassed, until Mrs. Galloway, at least, emptied her mind of every impression.

Mr. McCabe sent the Connors, Mrs. Shapiro, and Blanche home in a taxi, while he piled all



the others into one automobile, holding Gracie on his lap in the front seat. To feel the kindly pressure of Uncle Matt's arms around her, as he held the rug well up around her shoulders, that the winds caused by their swift flight might not visit her too roughly, rounded out and completed the joy of the little girl in this, the greatest event of her life.

When they arrived at Miss Mattie's, he came in with them, helping Joe.

As soon as Miss Mattie had turned up the gas in the back room, old auntie began to fidget. She plucked nervously at the front of her waist.

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Galloway. "You want me to take Miss Mattie's lace collar off for you?"

The old woman shook her head.

"I've got it here!" she said, clutching her bosom. Mrs. Galloway stared. Then suspicion grew. "What you got there?" she demanded.

With trembling fingers the old woman unbuttoned two buttons of her waist and plucked her roast quail out of her loose basque. The bird was wrapped in her clean pocket handkerchief.

Mrs. Galloway made a lunge for her, a shamed crimson mantling her large cheeks, but Mr. McCabe put out a detaining hand. He recognized a new expression on the old woman's face.

Miss Mattie's eyes saw also. She went up to the old woman.

OLD AUNTIE LOVES HER NEIGHBOR 467

"What are you going to do with it, Auntie?" she said gently. "Did you save it to eat here?" The old woman shook her head.

"I brought it to Gracie's kittie," she whispered, "cuz I'm sorry I pulled her tail. You said, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' did n't you, Miss Mattie? An' I did n't! I pulled her tail. It hurt her, an' she cried! 'N' I'm sorry. Here, kittie! Here's a nice bird I saved for you! Kitties like birds! I remembered that!"

She was on her knees by the cat's side, stroking her fur. Old auntie looked up into Miss Mattie's face. "I been waitin' till I could git her somepin' nice!" she said.

Mrs. Galloway gulped, then bent and lifted the old woman to her feet, and felt of her forehead and hands. She shook her head as she led old auntie away.

"I'm goin' to miss her awful, when she goes!" she said in a quivering voice. "I just hate to see her git so sweet, cuz it's a sign, an' it'll only make me grieve for her worse an' worse. When she goes, I'll be left all soul alone! Come on, old auntie! If you git sick in the night, mind you wake me up quick. Guess I'll leave the kittle bilin', so's I can hev hot water handy, in case you're took sudden! Good night, all! If I don't come down in the mornin' at the usual time, Miss Mattie, you better come up!"



CHAPTER XXXII

A PLACE PREFARED FOR YOU

ON THE Saturday before Easter Miss Mattie's triumph seemed assured. The craze for flower toques and muffs, started in her quiet little shop, had spread even to the department stores.

Blanche was wildly happy. It satisfied her too exuberant flow of spirits to be obliged to work nights to fill orders. And when Miss Mattie actually had to have in two assistants, Blanche's cup of rejoicing well nigh overflowed.

Miss Mattie, too, seemed pleased, but in a quieter way.

"It means that I can take the children to the country for a couple of months, and shut up the shop—a thing I've never dared to do before—so it's a gift of Divine Love," she said.

Mrs. Galloway was, however, more specific in her remarks. She saw to it that Mrs. Waugh heard of every step in Miss Mattie's upward progress. Maggie Connor's speech grew so pungent and personal that one whole day Mrs. Waugh dared not descend the stairs even to go to market for fear of meeting her, and at night Ursula was sent to Vogelsang's Delicatessen for food to relieve the besieged fortress of Waugh.

Blanche had not yet told Miss Mattie of Mr. McCabe's promise, both on account of the Easter rush and because Miss Mattie had not seemed well for several weeks. She kept on her feet, but her strength appeared to be failing. Her already white cheeks grew whiter, and her large eyes looked like burning coals. Several times, to Mrs. Galloway's gasping dismay, Miss Mattie was found lying down in the daytime.

The feeling of spring was in the air, and the neighbor-women tried to comfort themselves with the hope that Miss Mattie only had spring fever, but when they met each other and spoke her name, there was in their minds that nameless terror of the silent unknown which seemed to be reaching out its icy fingers for their beloved neighbor.

Then the day came when Mrs. Galloway could stand it no longer. She had not voiced her growing anxiety to any one, and in her fear and bewilderment there seemed but one person in all the world to appeal to. So one afternoon she stepped out to a public pay station and called up Mr. McCabe.

Now when Mrs. Galloway had anything on her mind, it weighed heavily. And when she got a thing off her mind, she did it thoroughly.

She came out of the telephone booth, dabbing at her eyes with her folded pocket handkerchief.

"Land o' love!" she sniffed, looking at its



snowy freshness. "I wisht I'd" a known I was goin' to cry, an' I'd 'a' brought two, so's I could use one!"

An air of mystery hung over the back room for a day or two. Mrs. Galloway hinted darkly that things were going to begin to happen. Blanche, full of her own secret, was likewise mysterious, but Miss Mattie merely smited and paid scant attention to either. She held Gloria in her arms most of the time now, and when she went for her slow walk she took the baby with her in the gocart.

One sunny morning late in April the telephone bell rang, and Mr. McCabe asked Miss Mattie if she would go with him to give her opinion on some property he was improving. It would mean an all-day trip in an automobile, he said, and he would call for her in about an hour.

Miss Mattie thought it rather odd that Blanche should have had her dress all laid out—the pretty new violet costume that Blanche had made her buy, even to the violet motor veil which Miss Mattie never had worn, nor even expected to wear, when Blanche insisted on her getting it. Still, Miss Mattie suffered herself to be dressed, and within the hour she was ready and waiting.

When the automobile drove up she was surprised to see that Mr. McCabe was driving it himself. It was a beautiful seven-passenger touring car,

and Miss Mattie looked longingly at the empty seats. But Mr. McCabe read her thoughts and shook his head.

"You are not going to pack the children and the neighbor-women into that empty tonneau!" he laughed. "This glorious spring day belongs just to you and me, and we are going to use all of it for our two perfectly selfish selves."

Mrs. Galloway, her hands tightly folded under her apron, was there to see them start. She was brilliantly satisfied with herself when she saw a faint color already tinge Miss Mattie's pale cheeks.

"A whole day in the open air in such weather as this ought to loosen up the joints 'n' rouse the liver 'n' git the blood to jist frolickin' in the veins!" she said. "I do' know what to make of Miss Mattie. She ain't got the liverish look, 'n' she ain't consumptive, 'n' yit — well! This I know! If anybody can cure her, that there man can do it! Come on, children! Les's pack a lunch 'n' go eat it in the Park!"

The automobile slid through the crowded city, crawled aboard a ferry, and rolled out from the village streets into the open country.

It was one of those marvelous days in spring when the smell of the earth is in the very air. Little wisps of wind started from nowhere and blew everywhere. Fragrances, forgotten from last year, sprang up suddenly from patches of

damp greenness and flung themselves upon the eager, waiting memory. Lace clouds trimmed the blue sky. Pungent odors came from disappearing clumps of pines. The rich decay of last year's brown leaves was pierced through by modest or pert young sprigs, that nodded coquettishly to all who passed. The steady purr of the big, smooth-running machine hummed alto to the high soprano breeze which sang in the ears of the travelers. All these sights and sounds caused Miss Mattie to draw deep breaths of sheer delight.

Suddenly the two looked at each other and smiled. Miss Mattie's hands, daintily gloved, were folded in her lap. Mr. McCabe reached out and held them both in a strong grasp, as he said:

"I want you to be happy to-day, dear friend! I want this to be a day you will remember all your life!"

"It will!" said Miss Mattie softly.

She watched him deftly steer the big machine over a bad place in the road. The heavy springs rocked them softly.

"You drive an automobile just as you do everything else," said Miss Mattie. "It's wonderful to me the way you do everything just right."

"Not half so wonderful as the way you read

perfection into everything I do," said Mr. McCabe, smiling. "I'm hardly used to this machine yet. I've only had it a few days."

"It is yours?" asked Miss Mattie in surprise.

"It is, for the present," answered Mr. McCabe, "I bought it to give to my wife."

He was looking directly into Miss Mattie's eyes as he said this, and she returned his gaze calmly.

"It's beautiful of you to think so much of her," she said gently. "I hope she — appreciates such thoughtfulness."

"I think she will. She does n't know of this particular evidence of it yet, but she is one of those rare women who naturally appreciate everything fine, however much hidden to other eyes."

Miss Mattie sighed. Then she said:

"I wish I knew her, Mr. McCabe!"

"You are going to see her this very day!" answered the man. "I am taking you to my farm, and there you will find her. On the way, we pass through the little village of Bethel, where I am about to buy out the only millinery business there is there, and what do you think I am going to do with it?"

"I don't know," said Miss Mattie, in a low voice.

Mr. McCabe slowed down the machine, turned partially toward her, and said: "Miss Mattie do



you know any young girl of our acquaintance, who is not quite happy where her sad story is known, who would like to begin over in a new place — a quiet little place, not even on the railroad, just on a trolley line, where city news penetrates slowly, where not even a newspaper is published —"

Miss Mattie's hand stole out and touched his. "Oh, Mr. McCabe! Do you mean Blanche? Is your heart big enough to take in the lost ones of my family, too? Are you going to buy this millinery business for my Blanche?"

The man nodded.

"She knows it!" he said. "I told her several weeks ago!"

Miss Mattie withdrew her hand and leaned back.

"And she's kept it to herself all this time," she murmured, "because she thought it would upset me. There's character for you! That shows how much she's improved since I took her in with me, because when she first came, she was about the most selfish girl I'd ever seen! Well, there's no use of my trying to say anything. You're beyond me. I no sooner get through wondering at one big, fine thing you do, than another's on the way. Your goodness just keeps me astonished all the time. Why, Blanche will be made over. She's got her chance now! She's

got her chance! I always told her it would come! There are green pastures for all of us, Mr. McCabe. All we've got to do is to be patient, and we'll be led right to them! I often tell the children that!"

"Are there any for you, Miss Mattie? I should like to see you come into your 'green pastures'!" Miss Mattie smiled.

"I'm in them now — if I only knew it," she said. "As it is, I keep feeling all the time that I'm on the way to them — but that's only because I don't take hold of my Father's promises as I ought. Some day you'll realize the truth of what I'm saying to you, and you'll remember that I said it to-day. I am in my green pastures right this minute, if I could only understand it. Love is all around me, protecting me, planning more for my comfort and happiness than I could possibly think out for myself, because It knows everything. It knows what I want better than I know myself, and It is leading me right into the green pastures I'm always promising myself. Don't you believe that, Mr. McCabe?"

"I don't believe it — I know it!" declared the man at her side.

She looked at him cautiously, but there was no smile to mar the confidence of his statement.

There was silence between them for a moment. Then he spoke.



"Did you ever think how nice it would be, Miss Mattie, if you could give up the millinery business and buy a little farm somewhere?"

"Buy one, Mr. McCabe!" cried Miss Mattie, with a little excited catch in her voice. "Why, if the children and I can afford to close up the shop for a couple of months this summer, and board on a farm, some near-by farm where the railroad fare won't be too high, I'll be the happiest woman on earth!"

"Why, you can afford that!" said the man. "Have you forgotten that my mother's legacy to you is paid quarterly?"

"I know," said Miss Mattie, coloring furiously. "But I've been thinking lately — you won't be hurt, will you, Mr. McCabe? I can't explain, but perhaps it would be better for me not to take any more money from you —"

"You are not taking it from me!" exclaimed Mr. McCabe. "It comes from my mother's estate!"

"I know it does," said Miss Mattie. "But other people don't know that. There are—there might be some who think, because you sign the cheques, that—"

Miss Mattie started at the violence of Matt McCabe's expletive.

"So!" he cried. "She got to you at last! The scorpion! The viper! The asp! You've had an anonymous letter, have n't you, Miss Mattie?"

Miss Mattie braided her fingers together. Her eyes besought him.

"How did you know?" she pleaded.

"Blanche and I have been keeping them from you for weeks! Miss Mostyn sends them. Bob caught her examining my cheque book once, and warned me, but I made light of the boy's foresight—fool that I was! I wish I'd killed her then and there. I will to-morrow! I'll wring her neck! I'll throw her out of the tenth-story window and start a hymn of thanksgiving as she strikes the pavement! I'll—"

"Oh, Mr. McCabe!" cried Miss Mattie, shaking a protesting hand. "Don't let such murder thoughts out! They don't hurt her. They only hurt you! They'll make you sick! Oh, please try to see how weak and sorry that poor young lady must have been before she could work herself up to such a piece of meanness. come natural to her. She must have been awfully disappointed in life some way — maybe she's been disappointed in love — you know how sick that can make a person! So let's be a little merciful to her — we who have suffered ourselves and know how awfully it hurts! My land! I've gone through such agony myself, I don't believe I'll ever rise up against a sister-woman and smite her down as long as I live! Life is so hard to a — to a husbandless woman!"



The murderous frown which had blackened the man's face gradually softened under the eager rush of Miss Mattie's soft voice. When she finished she smiled up at him. She heard himgrind his teeth. Then she caught his eye.

"It's all over!" she said gayly. "You don't hate her any more. You've forgiven her. You've had compassion on her, just the same as our Elder Brother would have done, and by our forgiving her, out here in God's sunshine, we've healed her too. She doesn't hate us any more either. Why, now that we see her as God sees her, pure minded and clean in heart, she could no more write me another of those terrible letters than she could fly. I'll make a prediction, Mr. McCabe. I'll never get another unkind letter from her again after to-day!"

The man threw in the clutch, and the machine sprang forward into first speed.

"You just bet you won't!" he growled from between set teeth. "But for a very different reason then the one you've given!"

"No matter what reason you think you mean," said Miss Mattie, "the truth of my prediction is from the reason I've just told you!"

She leaned forward, smiling happily. Forgiving her enemy had healed her of her heaviness of heart. Mr. McCabe looked at her, and saw that she was herself again.



A PLACE PREPARED FOR YOU

470

After three hours of stiff driving they approached a village. It lay among the Ramapo hills, beautiful in their duns and browns and young greens of coming spring. The town was picturesque, its cottages set on lawns, some fenced, some hedged, some terraced. Its one main street, lined with neat shops, stretched through the village from end to end.

Mr. McCabe drew out his watch.

"It's dinner time in Bethel," he said, "so we won't stop at Miss Manring's now. We'll race out to the farm and have ours, and see her on the way back!"

"How — how far is it?" stammered Miss Mattie. Her hand stole up to her hair. She wished passionately that she had listened to Blanche and taken more pains with her dress. If she were going to meet Mr. McCabe's wife, for some unknown reason she wished to look her best.

The powerful machine rolled through the village street and began to climb into the hills. A gradual ascent of two miles led to a plateau. From this height, as they spun along, the panorama of their route for the last twenty miles could be traced.

Still ascending, they reached a stone gateway, with the name overhead — Tranquillity.

Mr. McCabe said nothing as he turned and drove in, but he watched her from the corner of his eye.

As she read the name, Miss Mattie clasped her hands in her lap and leaned forward, drinking in the beauties on both sides of the drive at once.

If Tranquillity had once been called a farm, it might now be dignified by the name of estate.

When they had gone a short distance, Mr. McCabe stopped the machine.

"I want to look at something here, if you don't mind. I've ordered some changes made in this cottage, and I want to see if they have been carried out."

"May I come too?" asked Miss Mattie.

"Certainly you may!" he answered, holding up his arms and lifting her to the ground with strong gentleness.

He unlocked the door, and they walked in. The cottage evidently had been done over from top to bottom, for the floors were still littered with shavings and the smell of fresh paint was everywhere.

"I don't believe I ever saw such pretty wall paper!" said Miss Mattie, gazing around her in delight. She followed him while he examined each room. The cottage was as complete in its appointments as care and thought could make it. There was even electricity, brought from the village, to cook with. Miss Mattie tried not to, and blushed at her own frowardness, but for the life of her she could not help mentally moving

into this cozy nest, placing her furniture here and there and everywhere, and allotting the upstairs rooms to the children and herself. It was exactly the right size — six rooms all told, and so filled with conveniences that a child could manage it. No need for Mrs. Galloway to help cook or Mrs. Eisenhut to help clean this place, if she could have it. She and Gracie and Joe could manage it all.

Mr. McCabe, reading her transparent mind, smiled in spite of himself.

"Is it all right?" he asked. "Can you suggest anything that I have forgotten?"

Miss Mattie simply looked at him.

"I don't believe I'll even answer that question!" she said with a spirit so unexpected that Mr. McCabe smiled again.

"I myself think that a caretaker would have to be pretty particular to want more than this!" he said. Then he shook his head. "But you never can tell! If I got one from New York, she would probably demand a piano in the furnishings."

"Caretaker! Piano!" repeated Miss Mattie.
"Is — do you mean to tell me this dear little cottage, that so many small families would go crazy over, is to be given to a caretaker?
Why —"

"Well, of course I have n't decided what to do.

Everything depends on what my wife wants. By the way, have I told you that I have resigned from my position on the Star, and that I am coming to Tranquillity to live?"

Miss Mattie had to clear her throat before she could answer. She turned partly away before she spoke.

"No," she said, "I don't believe you have mentioned it. Or if you have, I—" She paused. Not even to save her pride could she indicate a falsehood. "No, you never told me, or I'd have remembered it!" she ended bravely.

She followed him out onto the porch.

"Let's leave the machine here and walk to the house," he suggested.

She acquiesced, and they left the winding driveway and struck out through the woods.

The man was a passionate lover of nature, and in that walk he poured out to the woman at his side, with all the power he was able to command, a description of the place, its history, what he had done to it, what it meant to him, and how its beauties dominated him. It seemed as if he were trying to show her the hidden depths of his soul, its beauties and yearnings, that she might know him at his best — realize his worth only that she might miss him the more.

Miss Mattie said little. Since knowing that she was to lose him out of her life, she had but one object in view—to hide from him what his loss would mean to her.

When they reached the house she was too dazed to observe its size or comfort. She felt as if she were walking on air — as if the solid earth had disappeared and left her suspended over chaos. Mr. McCabe, too, seemed strangely excited.

The woman he summoned from the kitchen he introduced as Mrs. Kohn. She took Miss Mattie upstairs and there left her, saying that dinner was just ready.

No one came to disturb or welcome the guest, and presently she descended.

She had taken off her hat, and when she came down Mr. McCabe stared at her in amazement. Covered by her dustcoat, he had not seen the new gown.

"Why, Miss Mattie," he said, "I thought the night of the theatre party I had never seen you look so well, but to-day you are lovelier than ever.!"

Miss Mattie stopped so suddenly she had to catch at the banisters to save herself from falling.

"Me?" she stammered, looking around. "Me, Mr. McCabe?"

"Surely! Why not?" he laughed. "Come! Dinner is on the table!"

He led her into the dining room, a low-ceiled room with heavy black oak beams and wainscoting. The table was set for two. Mr. McCabe

vouchsafed no explanation. He drew back her chair, seated her, then found his own place, and the dinner progressed.

Mrs. Kohn, injured and silent, waited on them and placed each dish on the table as though it were an affront she could ill support, to be obliged to wait at all.

Mr. McCabe ignored her. His manner grew more nervous, and unconsciously he hurried Miss Mattie. She laid his nervousness to the sad associations the house possessed.

When the meal was over, he offered to show her the house, and together they began to explore.

Miss Mattie had never seen anything like it. Each room was in perfect taste, and everywhere were the evidences of travel, culture, and refinement. Yet she did not feel out of place. Rather she felt that this was something—a phase of existence—she might attain to, master, become accustomed to. It neither bewildered nor frightened her as it would have done two years ago. The coloring everywhere was subdued, soft, and tranquilizing.

Suddenly she spoke.

"I know why you named this place Tranquillity," she said. Mr. McCabe was standing at her side, looking out of an upper window at the marvelous view of the valley, which spread out before them like a panorama.

"I thought you would!" he said gently. He turned away.

"Sometime I'll take you over the whole farm. But not to-day. Miss Mattie, I have something — many things to say to you, and I have made this opportunity in which to explain them. Will you come into the library and sit down? For it is a long story I have to tell you!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN THE LIBRARY AT TRANQUILLITY

SOMETHING in Mr. McCabe's manner made Miss Mattie's heart beat quickly. He led her into the library, a great room walled with books. In the large fireplace an open fire burned softly. He placed her in a high-backed, leather-cushioned chair, and flung himself on a black fur rug at her feet.

In spite of his length he seemed inexpressibly boyish as he looked up into her face and with his long, thin fingers tossed the thick lock of hair back from his forehead.

"Miss Mattie," he said, without preface. "Do you know where I first saw you?"

"That day I found Joe and you helped me?" she hazarded.

"No, I saw you once before that. I never forgot you. From that hour, I seemed to be unconsciously seeking you."

The man paused, and looked thoughtfully into the fire, as if pondering what he had just said.

"No," he repeated; "I never forgot you. So that it was Fate which brought us together again."

Miss Mattie stirred uneasily. She wondered where his wife was.

IN THE LIBRARY AT TRANQUILLITY 487

"You did not know me at all," he went on, "yet you let me walk into your home, into your life, without any recommendation, or any 'character,' as far as you knew, and you welcomed me into the society of those dear children—even into your own heart—as if you knew how sorely I needed your gentle companionship. Now the time has come for me to tell you something of that friend you have made. I want you to see my past life spread out like a page for you to read, with its pothooks, its scrawls, its hand-writing, its blots—yea, even its tear stains, although I could never weep."

Miss Mattie, at the first hint of his need of her, instantly forgot everything troublesome, and leaned forward protectingly.

"You can tell me if you want to," she said, "if you feel that it will do you any good. But I don't need explanations from you, Mr. McCabe. I've watched the changes take place in you, that maybe you did n't realize, because you were so good and kind to begin with — always strong and helpful to the weak, wherever you found them, and such a fine example for the boys to copy. 'Try to be like Mr. McCabe,' was what I always told Bob and Joe, 'and you'll satisfy anybody!' So you see I don't need to know things that — it might hurt you to tell!"

The man pressed his palm to his forehead, then turned partly away from her and thought swiftly.

"Miss Mattie," he said, "I never knew a woman like you! Never! I did n't know they grew. I wish I had known you twenty years ago. My life would have been happier."

Miss Mattie made no reply, and with a quick movement he turned toward her again.

"I must tell you!" he said. "It will help you to understand. I was a perfectly well, strong child, but inclined to be solitary and dreamy. Other children did not understand me and rather avoided my company. So I learned my sports by myself. I could do all the things other boys of my age did, and some that were beyond them. I enjoyed danger for its own sake, and often tempted death, without realizing it. My father died when I was twelve, and my mother's health began to fail from that time. They were devoted to each other, with a rare and beautiful sympathy which dignified love in my boyish eyes and lent it a halo which I supposed belonged to wedded love. But the ruthless separation of these two lovers, my mother's meek submission to what she termed the will of God, sowed the seeds of atheism in my immature mind. For myself, with my bounding health and my lust for excitement and danger, I rebelled fiercely at the thought of death. I read my Bible, not as you do, but

IN THE LIBRARY AT TRANQUILLITY 489

eagerly endeavoring to find why such contradictory beliefs could abound among God's people. I discovered that it plainly says our Elder Brother came to abolish death, yet here we were dying younger and younger every year and submitting without a protest! My mother rebuked me when I voiced these doubts and reported me to our clergyman, who tried to convince me, but I downed him with his own Bible at every turn. did not know where the healing and dead-raising power had gone to, nor why it had disappeared. He said it had only been bestowed upon a favored few, and for a limited time. When I ruthlessly demanded proof of this belief, from any statement anywhere in the Scriptures, he could not answer, so he reproved me for impiety. He had no answer to the statements of Paul and James and Timothy. And to that tremendous declaration in Hebrews where it says 'that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death and deliver them who, through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage,' he made the weak answer that it was wrong to be afraid of death because death was a necessity. Indeed, he made it such a necessity that he died — a young, strong, active clergyman and a faithful servant of his God, according to his light, which was certainly dim — within the year. This added to my confusion.

"Then I went to college, and there I found, for the first time, that my bookishness need not of necessity spell loneliness. Others there were, greater students than I, who made and kept friends, and in my eagerness not to seem alien, I joined them in whatever they suggested."

He paused a moment in silent retrospection and then went on:

"Good taste, rather than morality saved me. Of religion I had none. I delved into philosophy of the sort I craved, and in my Godless state I found exactly what I was consciously seeking. We all do that, I think.

"I graduated with honor, made a society which allows me many opportunities in whatsoever city I find myself, and soon I found my work. It was congenial and I made money."

He sprang up, mended the fire, and began to pace the width of the room, his head bent forward, his hands behind his back.

"Don't get impatient, Miss Mattie!" he said.
"This may be dull, but it is essential, and it leads up to what I have to say."

"I never thought of its being dull," said Miss Mattie, simply.

"Thank you, dear friend!" he said, and smiled at her.

"In all this time, I had never been in love. That was partly due to my native fastidiousness

IN THE LIBRARY AT TRANQUILLITY 491

and partly to the high ideal I had before me in the standard I had unconsciously fixed for myself. Of course there had been girls who attracted me, but there had been no love on my part, as I understood love.

"Then —"

He paused in his walk and looked down at Miss Mattie. She was sitting, looking into the fire, with her chin in her hand. The big, black leather-cushioned chair formed a background for her slender figure and shapely head.

The man's gray eyes took in every detail, and a look of tenderness she did not see softened his rugged features.

"Then I met — the woman! My first love! So beautiful she was that I endowed her with every imaginable grace and glory. There was not a height upon which I, in my infatuation, did not place her. I worshiped her, and when she acknowledged an answering love, I think there never was another lover so nearly bereft of his senses as I. I could not stand it to be indoors. I plunged out of the house into the darkness of the night and walked — walked until daylight found me, and even then I could scarcely credit the wonder.

"She wrote me exquisite letters. She knew how I adored her beauty, so her photographs were mine in profusion. I spent hours in

studying her perfections, for indeed I have never, before or since, seen such physical loveliness.

"Our marriage was planned. She seemed to care for me all that she was able, and while I knew her love was not so deep as mine, I rather gloried in pouring out upon her more than she could return.

"Then one day she sent for me. I went, buoyant with happiness that she should summon me. I often look back upon my feelings as I went to her house that day, for I have never known what I could truthfully call a happy hour from that day until — I met you!"

Miss Mattie gave him a startled glance, but he ignored it and hurried on.

"Then she came down and she told me, as calmly as I would descant upon the weather, that she did not love me and that she was going to marry another man—a multi-millionare, many years her senior. 'I will be frank with you,' were her words. They were accompanied by a smile meant to be disarming, but with those words she laid bare to me the nakedness of her soul. With a calmness which bereft me of speech, she set forth the advantages she would acquire by this marriage, and ended by saying she had been at her wits' end to simulate a love to match mine, but she doubted if she could have kept up the delusion much longer.

IN THE LIBRARY AT TRANQUILLITY 493

"I have never been able to decide whether her brutality was natural, or assumed in order that I, in a frenzy she foresaw, would cast her off utterly and thus leave her free and unhampered by idle pleadings.

"But from whatever reason, it was efficacious. My love for her died as completely as if it had been stabbed to death before my very eyes."

He paused, and the thoughts of both were busy with the past.

"I know," said Miss Mattie softly, "just how you felt. I—I've been through it—all!"

"I know you have," he answered. "I know it in a way you do not dream. But we took different paths to the place we sought."

He swept his hair from his forehead again and hurried on.

"After trying and repudiating vice as a healing agency, I invented a mental companionship that I did not believe could exist, until I met you. I formed a mental concept of all I would have a wife to be, but as she was merely the creation of a restless imagination she failed me a thousand times. I endowed her with every quality I did not possess. I gave her a religion in which I did not believe, so that through it all you can see that I longed always to be a different and a better man, without knowing how to begin. I wanted to believe in a God. Even Gracie's spiritual eyes

saw that fact. The dear little maid! My dear little maid, from this day on! Then when you came, and I saw just how it was to be done, do you wonder that I value not at all the ignorant scholasticism with which I have littered my good mind, and that I enthrone the woman who has given me the regenerating principle by which I can work out my life-problem?"

CHAPTER XXXIV

MISS MATTIE FINDS HER OWN GREEN PASTURES

NR. McCABE paused as if expecting an answer, but Miss Mattie did not hear. Her mind had seized on the almost inconceivable fact that Mr. McCabe was not married. There was, then, no harm in her—

He was speaking again. She broke off her own tumultuous thoughts and tried to listen, but the singing in her heart went on. If this were true, why—

"Out of dreams I created an ideal for myself. I knew what sort of companionship I wanted—what gentleness, unselfishness, tenderness, and love I would have in a wife—so I—"

Miss Mattie interrupted him, a great wonder and a great tremulous gladness dawning in her face and voice. Still, she could not believe! She must hear the words!

"Have n't you ever had a real wife, Mr. McCabe?"

"No, Miss Mattie, I never have. Do you know why?"

She shook her head.

"Because I never found all my ideals vested in one woman until I met — you! Oh, have n't

you seen? Did n't you know? It has been so plain to other eyes, I feel as if every one knew except just you! Miss Mattie, ever since I have known you, I have been homesick for you!"

"But the picture on the wall—that Joe saw?" whispered Miss Mattie incredulously. She seemed to hold her breath for his answer.

"Was the face I had conjured up to hang my dreams upon. It was a copy of a painting I once saw in Rome."

"But the automobile — to-day. You said it was —"

"For you, Miss Mattie. I bought it for you! This house is yours, and the heart of the man at your feet — literally at your feet — is all yours; and I know, without your saying so, I know even if you do not, that your heart is mine. Don't you know that we love each other — that we have loved each other from the first — perhaps even before we met?"

"Oh," cried Miss Mattie, drawing back. "I never thought of such a thing! I never dreamed of it! I think of you as my—our friend! The dearest, best friend we've got—me and the children—one that we'd miss dreadfully if we lost! But as for—"

She stopped, and he searched her face quizzically.

"Go on!" he said. "Look deeper! You've

never dared say even to yourself that you have learned to trust me, to turn to me in every trouble, — yes, say the words!— to love me, because I purposely let you think, as I have deliberately let others think, that I was married. For years I have misled them. It kept them quiet, and saved explanations. Yet in spite of all barriers, your heart has reached out to mine just as mine reaches out to yours. Why did I want only you when my mother passed on? Why did I write you that letter? Because we have reached each other through the suffering which purifies and uplifts and burns away the dross of self. We both know now that the best of our lives must be given to the children and to — what is it?—loving our neighbors as ourselves!"

Miss Mattie's face glowed.

"Oh, Mr. McCabe!" she cried. "If you mean that—if your heart is great enough to take my children in—"

"Not only the children, but the neighbor-women!" he declared with a quick laugh. "The cottage is for Mrs. Galloway and old auntie, and if any of the rest of them want to come — well, Tranquillity is vast, and my love for you is big enough to take in all your homeless ones also!"

He reached out his arms and drew her toward him.

"I love you, Miss Mattie!" he said gently.

"It may take me years to teach you all that that means. But if you come to me, I promise that no storms shall buffet you which I can avert, and no sorrow reach you that shall not reach me first! Oh, you dear, storm-tossed soul! Let me hold you safe in these arms that yearn to gather you and your children into them and hold them there forever."

For just a moment Miss Mattie suffered him to hold her. Then she drew away, and he saw tears in her eyes.

"It's beautiful," she said, "and more wonderful than anything I ever thought of in my life. It makes me ashamed to think I ever imagined I cared for anybody else when I find how different the respect is that I feel for you — with the other too. But I can't let things happen too fast. I must — I must go away for awhile — I don't know how long it'll take me, but —"

At first the man smiled, not believing her. But when he saw the purpose in her eyes, a fierce anxiety took possession of him.

"Are you serious?" he cried. "I can't believe it! I want you to marry me immediately! I want you and the children to spend the summer on the farm! I have planned it all out. Gloria must not stay in town in hot weather. She must be out of doors in the clover. And you — I cannot live without you, now that you know!"

"No!" said Miss Mattie again. "I must go

away. If I should let this—this wonderful thing in, I must be prepared for it. I am not fit to be your wife now, Mr. McCabe. I've got to—well, go to school, you might say! I've got to learn how. You must let me study and prepare myself, so I won't shame you by my poor talking!"

He stared at her.

"Do you mean that?" he said slowly. "Do you think I am so poor a creature that I would let you go away from me to learn? Look about you! On all sides are books — the collection of a lifetime! We will study together — you and I. I will help you in your studies. If you go to school, Miss Mattie, you will go to school to me! Why, your language is sweet to me — it is so gentle, so unselfish, and so full of a nobility no books could teach. I have given up my position on the paper and we are coming here to live, where you can be out of doors all the time. You have worked all your life, little girl! Now, I want you to learn how to play. We will all study together — the children, too! Oh, in my loneliness, I have peopled this sorrowful place with your lovely images too long, to be willing to wait for anything more than your consent to come. Oh, Miss Mattie-sweet! If you will come, I will promise to be very good to you! I will try to be worthy of you!"

He bowed his head upon his hands, then looked up with a start. His stern gray eyes were dim.

"Tears!" he cried. "Tears! The first I ever remember to have shed!" His astonishment surprised Miss Mattie.

"I did not know I could be moved like that!" he said, still wondering. "I have felt grief—even poignant anguish, many times, but dryeyed. Now here I find myself moved by love and happiness to the point of tears! Verily, Miss Mattie, your strange influence heals every hurt! You wonder-woman!"

"I can't believe it! I can't understand it! I am not worthy of such honors!" she whispered. He averted his head a moment, pondering.

"Look around you at these books — more than ten thousand, written by the wisest men and women who ever lived. I have read most of them, yet I do not know how to do what you did for just Gloria! I spent eighteen years in going to school and college, yet not in all that time did I learn to do what you have done for Gracie. Tell me which is more worthy — my empty, Christless learning, or your sure knowledge of God's power to heal all evil? While I was here at Christmas I reread some of those books on that third shelf. They state in unmistakable terms that the miracles of raising the dead

and healing the sick were performed for some three hundred years after Christ's ascension."

Miss Mattie lifted her head.

"What books?" she breathed.

"Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire and Rawlinson's Historical Evidences of the Truth of the Scriptures. Then there are the Ante-Nicene Fathers—Clement, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian—"

Miss Mattie interrupted him.

"Are there books besides the Bible that tell about the things the early Christians did? Book written by historians that prove the Bible to be true?"

The man looked his astonishment. Miss Mattie saw it and her face flushed.

"Does n't that just show how weak we are!" she cried. "I know God heals, yet the minute you said that worldly books had borne witness to it, I pretty near walked right over to them and began to read!"

Mr. McCabe smiled.

"We will read them together, and then you will see that you bear them out instead of their bearing you out! What you can do—your own works—have proved the Bible a truth for men to live by today—a thing far more vital than their man-made assertions that miracles were performed two thousand years ago. I want to know that Christ's promises can all be made

good for me—this very hour—and that is what you have proved to me! I met Dr. Follansbee on the street recently, and told him that Gracie could hear perfectly. He laughed at me, and said he did n't believe even God could perform such a miracle in these days. You do not realize what you have done and are doing all the time for Blanche and Joe and old auntie—for all of us who need you! Oh, I am selfish to want to marry you and have your wonderful influence for good at work in my life,— to want you to do for me what you have done for the children."

Miss Mattie leaned forward and took one of his hands in both of hers. Her eyes looked deep into his.

"I shall love to do it, Mr. McCabe, if you just want me to! That's all I ask! Just to be let to do it! Only I don't understand how I can do any good to such a — a happy, successful, strong man, as you seem to me."

"I don't wonder," he answered with apparent irrelevance, "that when I once saw you I never forgot you!"

"You've said that twice," said Miss Mattie. "When was the first time you saw me?"

"I want to tell you, and get it over with," he said, "but I wonder if you can bear it?"

She looked down at his two hands clasping hers, and the rich color stained her white cheeks.

"Seems to me, now," she said shyly, "that there is no pain for me — anywhere in the world!"

The man bowed his forehead on their clasped hands. The words came out with a rush.

"I was in the courtroom the day you testified. I was there, with a sick heart, believing all women cold, calm, calculating, covetous devils. And I saw the look you gave that poverty-stricken, worthless wretch. I saw that look! Then I knew that there was one woman who knew how to love and how to suffer for an ideal — as I had suffered! From that day to this I have known subconsciously that we belonged to each other, although I was months discovering why I always longed to be with you and knew no peace away from you."

"I can hardly take it in," said Miss Mattie, "for somehow I never think that men care the same as women, or know how to suffer as we do." "Some men don't," answered Mr. McCabe. "I happen to be one of those who do. And because I knew what I had done under such bitter grief and disappointment, I was curious to see what you would do. I knew you the moment I saw you at old Sproule's door. I knew where you lived, and I had been wondering how I could renew the acquaintance with propriety when Bob turned up and made the way easy."

"I never figure things out, the way you do," said Miss Mattie. "I did n't make plans and decide on a way to live, and all that. I just went from one day to another. The way seemed to open of itself. I have been led, Mr. McCabe, every step of the way. I just worked!"

"And I just dreamed!" answered the man bitterly. "If I had worked — mentally — it would have been better. I first turned to drink. as weak men always do. I saw whither that path led, and turned back in time. But I was hatefilled. You never were. You took Love to be your companion and guide; I chose Hate. And where you found peace, I found misery and wretchedness beyond description. I became a victim of what you call self-pity, because I had never frittered away my love on many girls as most young men do. I loved only one — and when she deceived me, she had to tell me twice before I could understand. I worshiped her! And she had duped me from the first!"

Miss Mattie's big brown eyes, burning with forgotten pain, looked steadfastly into his.

"And you — cared!" she whispered. "You cared for some one who never lived, just as I did! Oh, how we deceived ourselves! It was n't their fault; it was ours!"

"Ours? How?"



HER OWN GREEN PASTURES

505

"You said a minute ago that we get what we seek. We were both reaching out, in our poor, blind, homesick way, for some one to love. It was just our miserable, selfish longing to be first with somebody. And you snatched at the first shadow that drifted by, just as I did! Shadows! That's all they were! That's why they misled and deceived and then mocked us. I've found out, since, that love is service!"

"Service, yes!" affirmed the man. "That is true substance. You have learned that perfect selflessness which brings peace. I proved you; I watched you prove yourself, and all that you believed, to be true. I saw with my own eyes that the pure in heart see God in their fellow-men and you showed me the healing which follows. I saw that your meekness inherited the earth and conquered all material obstacles. I had to see what true humility does. Oh, Miss Mattie-sweet, won't you help me to humble my pride and learn it too? I do so long for that peace which passeth understanding, the peace which you know!"

He stood up, and drew her into his arms.

"I love you," he said solemnly, "but it is with a love that will never seek to change your lifework or bend it to my pattern. I respect your source of true wisdom too reverently to wish to change you in any way. You suit me perfectly, just as

you are, and my love for you is so deep and so wide that it takes in all your homeless ones—all your plans for the future of the children and of Bob and Blanche. And if you will marry me—soon—Miss Mattie-dear, I will show you that all I want in this world is to devote my life to learning your way of loving your neighbor as yourself!"

CHAPTER XXXV

THE NEIGHBOR-WOMEN HEAR THE GREAT NEWS

A S THE machine rolled smoothly along, Miss Mattie spoke:

"I don't want to begin by criticizing and being unpleasant —" she began.

"Of course not," said Matt McCabe, smiling broadly at the picture.

Miss Mattie braided her fingers together.

"And I never want to grudge a sister-woman all she can honestly make—"

"I'm sure you don't!" was the prompt supplement.

"Still," hesitated Miss Mattie, "I do think you paid Miss Manring an awfully big price for her business! Why, Mr. McCabe, that would buy me out, and I've got ten times the custom she has!"

"Is that your view of it?" he asked quizzically. "Miss Mattie, I think I cheated her! I have the remorseful feeling that I took advantage of her inexperience. Why, if she had known how much more I would have paid if she'd only asked it, I might have something to worry about. As it is, I'm going to make her an additional present. She told me, in one of our talks, that she had

never owned a gold watch. We will go down to-morrow, you and I, and select one. I want your opinion on another purchase, too."

Miss Mattie's seriousness delighted him.

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it," she said, "it must be all right. And of course I'll go with you and help all I can. What else do you want to buy, Mr. McCabe?"

"I want to buy two rings — one a plain gold band," he said, turning to look at her. Suddenly his hand shot out, and seized her wrist.

"You should n't try to leave an automobile when it srunning forty miles an hour!" he reproved. "This is n't an express wagon, you know!"

"I did n't mean — I was n't going to —" stammered Miss Mattie.

An agonized red stained her cheeks. Mr. McCabe deliberately enjoyed her confusion.

"Have you thought," he asked solemnly, "what the neighbor-women will say?"

"Oh!" cried Miss Mattie. "Oh, Mr. McCabe! Must you tell them right away?"

"I'm going to tell Mrs. Galloway and old auntie to-night," he declared. "I've nearly succumbed because I could not tell them before this. That cottage has almost been the last of me, in my anxiety to see how they will take the idea of living in it. You think they'll want to come, don't you?"

"Want to come!" cried Miss Mattie. "I don't believe you could stop them! If you—" "We!" corrected Mr. McCabe, exultantly.

"Well, if we did n't have room for them at Tranquillity I believe they'd move in on the next place! Seems like Mrs. Galloway can't live without those children—'specially Gracie. She just worships that child!"

"I don't wonder!" exclaimed Mr. McCabe heartily. "Three lovelier and more interesting children I never saw anywhere! It will be hard for me not to spoil Gloria! For months—ever since I woke up to the fact that Happiness with a large H had run after me and overhauled me in my stupid, blind chase of black Despair—in my mind's eye I have seen Gloria's golden head with the sun shining on it, and herself seated in a field of red clover, listening to the drone of the bees and seeing the butterflies with what you call her spiritual eyes!"

"And what do you call them?" asked Miss Mattie gently. "Oh, Mr. McCabe, when you can see and make others see such beautiful pictures, and when you have opened your big, kind heart to three of God's little ones—"

"Three?" questioned Matt McCabe. "It seems to me, when I count up my blessings, that I find four, and the most blessed is the one you left out!"

"Oh!" gasped Miss Mattie. "I wish you would n't say such things to me, Mr. McCabe! Just yet, I mean. I'll believe that you think them, if you want me to, but I don't think I can stand them until I've had a little more time to get used to the thought that you're referring to me! I keep looking behind me to see if there is n't another woman you're talking about, and one that would deserve them more!"

Respecting her seriousness, the man said, "What were you going to say, Miss Mattie, when I interrupted you?"

Miss Mattie searched her memory.

"I don't know. You made me forget. I'm sorry, because it was something I thought might help you."

"I would know that, without your saying so," he answered. "If you have a beautiful single characteristic in the world, I would call it a gentle, persistent beneficence to every man, woman, and child who crosses the pathway of your thought. It is your life to help people! The first thing that flashes into your mind when a new individuality presents itself is, 'What can I do to help that soul, and what to ease that body? What to beautify that life, and what to speed that lagging happiness?' In all my experience, Miss Mattie, I never imagined a character like yours! No wonder you are

misunderstood in your small world. In the great world, you would be destroyed."

"I know now what I was going to say," cried Miss Mattie. "You've brought it all back to me by this new picture. I don't deserve it at all, but it makes me happier than I ever was in my life to have you think that way. It — it pays for all I — thought I suffered! Oh, don't you see how wrong it is to go through such agony? Here you were, waiting for me, all the time — and I never —

Miss Mattie broke off, her voice trembling, her eyes full of tears.

The man closed his hand over hers.

"Don't!" he said roughly. "I can't bear it! Please tell me what you were going to say — that you forgot."

"Oh," answered Miss Mattie, "it was this, that now you will have plenty of time and no business and — with the — with — me to run the house —" this last came with a frightened gasp — "why can't you begin to put all your beautiful word-pictures in a book? Why don't you begin to write? You can! I told you the first time I saw you that you'd got Success written all over you, and now that you've let God in, there is no limit to what you can do!"

The man looked at her in fresh surprise. hands were clasped in her lap, her eyes shining

like stars, her lips parted over her perfect teeth, and her whole attitude was one of holy enthusiasm—that enthusiasm which begets literature, no matter whence its source.

An answering flame was kindled in Matt McCabe's sensitive, receptive mind. All the yearnings of his young manhood surged back over his soul in resistless force. He saw himself in a perfect environment, happiness and peace at his side, and his lifework spread before him like a golden dream.

Furthermore, he began to realize that in the woman at his side he would find not only inspiration but material. Her spiritual intuition had always stirred him. Now it promised spiritual ideas which would multiply and replenish the earth.

He drew a long breath of potentially satisfied ambition, and Miss Mattie smiled in perfect content. She read in the expression of his eyes what he would do, and for the first time she began to realize what her companionship might mean to him.

It was fortunate that this fragment of conversation took place before the ordeal of telling the neighbor-women occurred, for it gave Miss Mattie confidence. If once she could feel that Mr. McCabe really needed her, that she could be useful to him, many of her fears would vanish

THE NEIGHBORS HEAR THE NEWS 513

and she would begin to fit herself into her new mental environment without rearing further barriers.

It was just dusk when the automobile drew up in front of the millinery shop. They could see Blanche lighting up, and the children playing in the salesroom. Gracie ran out, Joe following slowly.

"I hope they'll all see us and come over!" said Mr. McCabe.

"I hope they won't!" said Miss Mattie, with spirit.

"In case they have n't—" Miss Mattie heard him murmur, and then, before she could interfere, he sounded the siren, and as the long-drawn-out music quivered in the still air, the neighbor-women appeared at the doors of their shops and windows of their flats as if they had been waiting to be summoned—as indeed they had.

In some mysterious wireless way, the street had felt something in the air when it saw Miss Mattie drive away alone with Mr. McCabe that morning, and had held its breath all day, wondering what the evening would bring forth.

The Connors and Mrs. Shapiro walked slowly toward them, smiling expectantly. Even Bob Avery appeared from nowhere at all and circled about the automobile as if drawn by an invisible magnet. He felt of it; he all but hugged it.

"Is it yours, Mr. McCabe?" he asked, in a sibilant whisper. "Is it yours? Is it yours?"

The neighbor-women had drawn near. Even Mrs. Galloway stood in the open door of the millinery shop.

"No," said Mr. McCabe distinctly; "it is Miss Mattie's. I gave it to her to-day!"

Mrs. Galloway was not the only one who reeled from the impact of this remark.

Maggie Connor, a broad smile on her pretty, wide mouth, took a step forward and looked into the faces of the two.

"Arrah! I knew ut!" she said, and pinched Blanche on the arm.

Miss Mattie, crimson and embarrassed, turned on her.

"I've seen ut from th' firrst! Have n't I, Ma?" cried Maggie.

"Then why did n't you tell me?" reproached Miss Mattie. "I did n't know it! I never suspected!"

Mrs. Galloway stepped forward.

"Tell what?" she demanded. "What did n't you know!"

"Why—" said Miss Mattie, and stopped.

"Go on!" urged Mr. McCabe. "Tell her, Miss Mattie!"

"You-a mean," questioned Mrs. Shapiro, "thata you and Mees Mattie—" "Oh, I am-a so glad!" cried Mrs. Shapiro. "It make-a me so hap'! You are-a both so good!"

"What makes you happy?" asked Mrs. Galloway. "What are they goin' to do, Maggie?"

"They're goin' to git marrud," cried Maggie Connor, "ye old stoopud! I've seen ut from the first! Have n't I, Ma? Where have yer eyes been, Mrs. Galloway! Me 'n' Blanche saw!"

Mrs. Shapiro had Miss Mattie in her arms.

"Now," said Mr. McCabe, "please set the table for everybody. I'll go and order a supper sent in. And then we'll talk it over. Mind you don't say anything while I'm gone! I want to hear every word! It is so — wonderful!"

He began his sentence lightly, but at the last his eyes rested on Miss Mattie's face. He hesitated; the very tone of his voice changed. He turned suddenly, gave the hat he was holding a quick jerk over his eyes, and strode away.

There was a moment of silence. Then Mrs. Galloway spoke. She had adjusted her steel-rimmed spectacles and watched him down the street.

"Land o' the livin'!" she gasped. "Who would ever 'a' thought of his s'lectin' one of us to marry! If he'd ast me, I'd 'a' dropped at his feet, stone dead with surprise!"

"Well, he did n't," cried Maggie, half hysterical at the idea; "he asked Miss Mattie. And he's meant to from the first! You saw it Blanche, did n't you?"

Blanche slipped an arm around Miss Mattie. "I am so glad, glad!" she whispered.

They all followed Miss Mattie into the shop.

"Stone dead," repeated Mrs. Galloway, "would I 'a' dropped if he'd ast me! Miss Mattie, how did you behave? Were n't you astonished?"

"I never was so surprised in my life!" cried Miss Mattie, stopping in her walk to be more impressive. They crowded around her.

"Then you was n't expectin' it?" persisted Mrs. Galloway, anxious to support her own unprepared condition.

"No more than you were!" asserted Miss Mattie.

"What's become of his wife? Is she dead or insane?" asked Mrs. Galloway, with true neighborly interest.

"Neither," answered Miss Mattie; "he never had one. He just had an idea of one — the kind he'd like to have, and he used to talk about her, to —"

"I know," interrupted Maggie, "to kape th' girruls at bay! Sure a man has to, these days—or else lock himself in a cage 'n' lose th' key!"

"No, he does n't feel that way, Maggie," said

Miss Mattie. "He does n't know he's handsome or seem to feel his riches. He speaks to me real sweetly of his pride, but I never saw a more modest man about his attractiveness and smartness and wonderfulness. He does n't realize that he's above all other men that we know. He does n't see himself as we see him—up on a pedestal and so different from us. He's a—well!" She paused helplessly. "I can't tell you! That's all!"

"I think he's th' best lookin' man iver I see!" cried Maggie, reveling in the romance as if it belonged to her. "Them light gray eyes in that brown face gives him such a queer, distinguished look. I don't see how you'll ever get used to the everyday idear of him, we've made Sunday-idears of him so long!"

"I'd 'a' died at his feet," reiterated Mrs. Galloway, "if he'd 'a' s'lected me. It's a wonder, Miss Mattie, that you did n't faint. Did you feel queer?"

"Yes, I did. I could n't believe he meant me. I wanted to look behind me to see if there was n't somebody else he was talking to."

Mrs. Galloway nodded her head in solemn understanding.

"Me too!" she said. "I'd 'a' done the same. Only worse!"

She had her large, capable, friendly hands

tightly clasped under her apron. The neighborwomen crowded about Miss Mattie, Blanche and Mrs. Shapiro with their arms still around her.

Miss Mattie slipped off her dust cloak and stood forth, her long violet motor veil floating down her back, with her arms on the shoulders of those nearest her. The Connors and the children pressed against her violet skirts.

They were still standing thus when Mr. McCabe returned with Bob, both carrying parcels of all shapes and sizes.

"Ice cream, Gracie," whispered Bob. "He ordered a gallon! Looky here! Help me undo them! He said to."

"I want her! And Mrs. Meyer. Run, Gracie, and get them!"

"I'll fetch old auntie," said Mrs. Galloway; "and Mrs. Meyer too."

She started for the door, then turned.

"Do you reelize," she said in a quivering voice, "all you that is laughin' 'n' feelin' so gay, that Miss Mattie Morningglory, our Miss Mattie, is goin' away? She's goin' to leave us! Have you took that in?"

She turned quickly to hide her tears.

Miss Mattie started to speak, but Mr. McCabe shook his head at her pleadingly; she stopped, and smiled.

"Not quite yet!" he begged.

Blanche and Maggie clutched each other in quick ecstasy at this sign of perfect understanding between them.

"Did ye iver?" whispered Maggie. "She's gettin' used to him already! Ain't she the wondher, though! As for me — well, I guess I feel like Mrs. Galloway," she added with a giggle. "Schtone dead at his feet would I 'a' dropped if he'd 'a' s'lected me! Holy Mike! Think of anny of th' rist of us darin' even to joke about ut! I'm wantin' to cry this minute — not weep in a la-adylike way — wan tear schtandin' back, wit a 'Afther you, Alphonse!' expression, and p'litely waitin' for th' right of way, but lettin' a catherack of thim pour down me cheeks ahl at wanst, at the idear of losin' her. Arrah! What will th' schtrate be witout Miss Mattie!"

She rushed out of the room, dragging Blanche by the hand.

Gracie, in swift obedience to her beloved Uncle Matt's command, had already begun to set the table. Her cheeks were flushed crimson, her violet eyes black with excitement and suppressed emotion. No one had taken the trouble to explain to the little girl, and she did not understand what was happening. When people married, she knew they generally went away.

Were Uncle Matt and Miss Mattie going away — perhaps to leave the children behind — to be sent back to the Home? She tried hard not to cry, but a few salty drops watered the shabby forks in her hands, and she was forced to wink hard.

Maggie and Blanche, anxious to get things started, hastily set supper on the table, and called everybody to "come on!"

Under cover of the cheerful clamor, Gracie slipped out to the automobile, where her quick eyes had seen some fresh spring flowers, withering on the floor of the tonneau.

Bob rushed after her, and helped her arrange them in Miss Mattie's blue bowl for the center of the table.

As they gathered around the white oilcloth and Miss Mattie viewed the dainty viands Mr. McCabe had ordered, served on her nicked and pieced-out set of cheap dishes, a memory of the heavy damask and fine china in her new home rushed over her. How she had longed for dainty table service, even almost envying Mrs. Eisenhut her rose-sprigged Christmas present, and now, what a wonderful Answer was here! And that was only one of the beauties and graces her new life was to be filled with!

In moments of excitement, Miss Mattie always lost her head.

Mr. McCabe, watching her, saw that her emotion was proving too much for her. Tears of nervousness were very near.

"Why, where is Gloria?" he asked quickly.

"She's asleep on my bed," said Mrs. Meyer.

"I want her waked up and brought down!" declared Mr. McCabe.

Blanche started on a run for the door. There she stopped, for as she opened it the quick sob of a child made itself heard.

Matt McCabe gave a hasty glance around the table, and then strode after her.

On the step sat Gracie, sobbing bitterly.

The man stooped over her, divining her trouble. He lifted her in his arms.

"My little maid," he whispered, "what is this? Are you crying on the cat? Well! I see that I'll have to comfort her, as well. Is she crying, too? Look me in the eye, Mrs. Mabel Irene McGillicuddy, thou shameless fraud of a pseudogentleman-cat! Are you going with Gracie and Miss Mattie and me to the farm to live—"

"Oh, Uncle Matt," screamed the child, "am I going, too? Am I? Am I?" She hugged him frantically.

"Are you? Why even Mrs. McGillicuddy's kittens are going! I heard some talk of giving them away, so I said to Miss Mattie, 'Let's get married soon, so the kittens will have a home.' And

Miss Mattie said, 'All right, my dear, anything you say. We'll be married next week, and—'"

"Why, Mister McCabe!" cried Miss Mattie, shocked. "I never said anything of the kind! The idea of —"

He laughed as he seated himself at the table, with Gracie still in his arms. He laughed again as he viewed the faces of the neighbor-women.

"Well, anyway, Gracie, you and Joe and Gloria — here she is! Blanche, let me have her, too! I want to see how it feels to be made a family man all of a sudden! Here we are! Both my little maids!"

The neighbor-women watched him in a fascinated silence, punctuated now and then by a nervous giggle from Maggie Connor.

Suddenly Mr. McCabe leaned his head back. "This is almost more than I bargained for! Look, Gracie! Mabel Irene must have understood what I said."

They all looked. The cat, moved by some odd, half-human instinct, had gone and fetched one of her kittens. Mabel Irene stood on her hind legs, holding its limp, patient little kitten-body in her mouth, her fore paws on Mr. McCabe's knee, with a look in her eyes which said as plainly as words, "Me, too, Matt!"

A shout of laughter went up, in which Mr. McCabe joined.

"By Jove, Mrs. McGillicuddy, your nerve will carry you far! Climb up, old girl! I might as well get used to being an omnibus, with always room for one more!"

He disposed of the cat in Gracie's lap and the kitten in Gloria's, where her little investigating hands reveled in its soft fur. Then he said, summoning the attention of the table by a glance:

"Can you imagine a happier life than we are going to live — all of us together on that big old farm where I was born, and where I played as a child, and where I know every inch of the land? What games we can play with the children! What water-picnics we can have on the lake! What fishing in the river! What fun building dams in the brook! Blanche is to have Miss Manring's business and be the Bethel milliner. I bought her out to-day. And if you are very, very good, Blanche, perhaps Miss Mattie will let you have the stock she has loaded up these rooms with — she intending to move in a few weeks —"

"Oh, Mr. McCabe!" cried Miss Mattie.

"What! Would you ask her to buy you out? Why not give her the things? You will never want them again—"

"It is n't that! It's your saying that I—"

"Well, perhaps it will be sooner!" said the man, placidly. "I only said several weeks because you

declared you could n't possibly get ready in less time, but—"

"Oh!" cried Miss Mattie again. "Oh! Oh!"

"Whisht!" whispered Maggie Connor. "He's teasin' her! Ain't it grrand! Think of ut! Teasin' Miss Mattie!"

Blanche nodded, squeezing her hands together in her lap and totally unable to speak.

"And then," pursued Mr. McCabe, "when you get homesick to see Miss Mattie, you must all come out—"

Here Mrs. Galloway upset the program by flinging her apron over her head and bursting into convulsive sobs, which shook her vast bulk as she rocked back and forth.

"I'm — homesick for her — now!" she bellowed. "I do' want her to git married 'n' leave us! What'll we do?"

Old auntie's face worked nervously. She got up out of her chair and trotted around to Mrs. Galloway.

"Don't ee cry, niece Galloway," she quavered in her thin, cracked voice. "You won't be lonesome! You've got me left. An' I don't claw you no more at all. We're reel happy together, since Miss Mattie showed us how to pray 'n' get our Answers! Ain't we, niece Galloway? Huh?"

Mrs. Galloway slowly removed her apron from

her face. The tears still trickled down her cheeks, evidently having started before they realized that they would not be wanted when they arrived.

"Miss Mattie never showed me how to pray!" declared Mrs. Galloway firmly. "I got my own way of prayin', 'n' it satisfies me! I never expect to be any better off 'n' I be right now! I'm satisfied! For I've got more 'n' I deserve! I reelize that."

"I ain't!" declared old auntie. "Miss Mattie told me there was green pastures for me some'ers, 'n' I ben declarin' it just like she told me to. 'N' expectin' it! I ain't too old! I ain't bed-rid! I kin work! There is no pain! Miss Mattie says so! Did n't you tell me I would find green pastures an' still waters, Miss Mattie, if I'd just be good?"

Maggie Connor pinched Blanche again, as her snapping eyes saw Miss Mattie raise her eyebrows at Mr. McCabe, and saw him nod his head at her.

"Old Auntie," said Miss Mattie, "sit down and let me tell you how your Answer has come. Set in the loveliest garden of flowers and shrubs and trees, on his farm — Mr. McCabe's farm, you know —"

"Our farm!" corrected Matt McCabe.

"Yes — there is a little cottage just large enough for two or three people. It has everything in it that heart could wish — a telephone, electric

lights, electricity even to cook with, hot and cold water, a cellar, and everything! And that cottage Mr. McCabe says is for you and Mrs. Galloway to live in — rent free — all your lives if you can be happy there! It is so close to — to our house that you can see us forty times a day, just as you do here, and —"

She paused, for tears were on every face.

Mr. McCabe for the first time looked horribly embarrassed. He hid his face behind Gracie.

Then Mrs. Galloway spoke:

"I—I do' know what to say—except just that between you, you've saved my life! I don't honestly b'lieve I could 'a' lived without—all of you, but 'specially Miss Mattie! Seems like, in spite of her blasphemious idears, I got a respect for her character, and a—a—hankerin' after bein' with her, till I can't stand it without her. This street has just seemed dead to me all day. Did n't I say so, Maggie?"

"Sure you did," affirmed Maggie, "and I agreed wit you. Did n't I, Ma?"

Old auntie sat with clasped hands, quiet tears stealing down her wrinkled cheeks.

"A farm!" she whispered. "I was born on a farm, but I never expected to git back to one! Be there a brook there, did ye say, Miss Mattie?"

"Yes, dear, a brook and a little lake. And a river borders the farm. It has everything!"

"Did you say 'lectricity to cook with?" came in Mrs. Galloway's deep voice.

Not realizing that Mrs. Galloway's imagination was so limited, Miss Mattie said yes, there was.

"I never heard of such a thing!" declared Mrs. Galloway. "It must be as dangerous as a third rail." She looked through the open door to where an arc light was throwing its hissing circles of white brilliancy on the pavement. "A man was fixin' that light to-day to make it work," she observed. "He had to climb the pole by spikes on his boots—"

"You will not have to cook that way!" said Mr. McCabe soothingly. "The electricity is brought from the village where Blanche will live, and all you have to do is to turn it on — just as you do the gas!"

"Sounds fine!" said Mrs. Galloway. "But I don't like to think of Blanche livin' alone — in the village, when there's plenty o' room for three, Miss Mattie says, in our house. If there's any way o' getting to an' from —"

"There are plenty of ways—trolley, carriage, and automobile," said Mr. McCabe. "Blanche can take her choice."

Blanche only shook her head. She could not speak.

"Is n't it wonderful?" said Miss Mattie.
Although it was not late, the neighbor-women

felt that it would be courtesy to leave early and let the lovers have some time alone. All were waiting for the sign to move.

Gloria had dropped asleep again, her golden head resting contentedly against Mr. McCabe. Gracie cautiously took her, with a skill born of long experience, and laid her in her crib. Then she returned and stood shyly at Mr. McCabe's side, regarding him with an adoring look that he felt was part of his future joy.

Maggie Connor had already sent a lift of the head to her mother, when Mrs. Galloway felt called upon to thank Mr. McCabe in words. Old auntie's eyes were growing heavy and her valiant head nodded now and then, in spite of her will to remain awake.

Mr. McCabe, seeing what was growing in Mrs. Galloway's mind, regarded her with twinkling eyes.

"Mr. McCabe," she began ponderously. She rose to her feet, in order to be more impressive. "I think you are the best man I ever knowed! Before I knowed you I had n't much respeck or opinion of men, havin' been half killed by my own husband, which is dead, thank God! But knowin' you has raised my whole idear of — of mankind. I now b'lieve that some men will git to heaven. Not that some I could mention will enjoy themselves much, playin' on a harp all day, when they

have been used to other an' more worldly pursuits. But as for you, you good man—"

Mr. McCabe, in spite of his anguished desire to hear more, felt obliged in common decency to cut her short. Not for worlds would he have allowed one of those simple souls to suspect that he found Mrs. Galloway amusing.

"Thank you, thank you, Mrs. Galloway!" he said. "Your praise overpowers me. I believe I'll move to adjourn this meeting sine die!"

The others rose, as if glad of the opening, and began to say good-night and to drift toward the front door.

While they were on their way, old auntie opened her eyes and mumbled, "What was that he said, niece Galloway?"

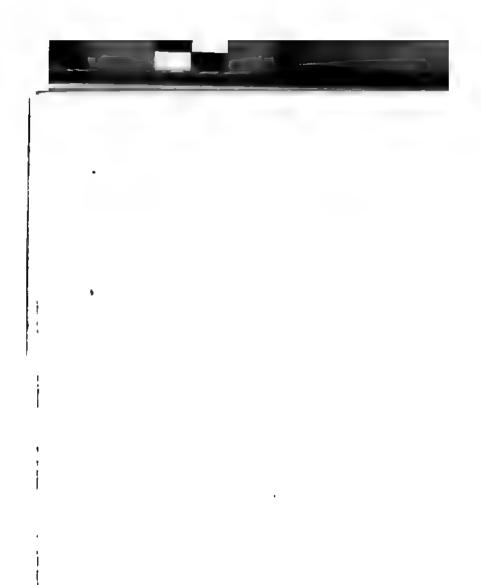
Mr. McCabe, with a glance at the children. reached for Miss Mattie's hand.

Mrs. Galloway cleared her throat.

"He said," she murmured, in a voice not intended to be overheard, "that he b'lieved he could move on his journey without a sign o' dyin', and if ever a man was good enough, it's him. You know Enoch done it —"

She helped the old woman to her feet, and together they started for the back stairs.

"Ouch!" observed Mrs. Galloway, as she closed the door on her own heel.



PROPERTY

OF THE NUW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY

A GRIPPING STORY OF THE NEW WEST

"—I Conquered"

BY

HAROLD TITUS

This is a royal story of the new West; of a real man's awakening to the fact that his crop of wild oats was a bit too healthy; of his determination to throw off the hold of city habits and to readjust himself by a life in the open.

There is so much red blood in the characters that it is impossible to withhold interest in their every action; while the story of the horse, "Captain," a wonderful free-runner of the plains, is absolutely entrancing.

This is a book which quickens the pulse beat, and refuses to be side tracked until the last chapter is completed, the last paragraph scanned. "I CONQUERED" is filled with the flavour of the soil and the atmosphere of the plains.

Colored Frontispiece by

CHARLES M. RUSSELL

Net \$1.25

RAND McNALLY & CO. CHICAGO

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Amarilly, of Clothes-Line Alley" BELLE K. MANIATES





Pictures
By
JOHN
DREW

This fine book is bound to appeal to the average lad. By pluck, determination, and hard work David rises from farmhand to Governor. He makes just such a courageous fight as many a boy has ahead of him; and his success will prove inspiring to a young reader. A charming love story, too, with touches of genuine and exquisite pathos, it is one of Miss Maniates' best productions and worth a place in any library.

75 CENTS NET

RAND McNALLY & CO.
CHICAGO NEW YORK

•

.

.

1

•



.

